MARCH 20th ISSUE, 1925
VOL. LI No. 5

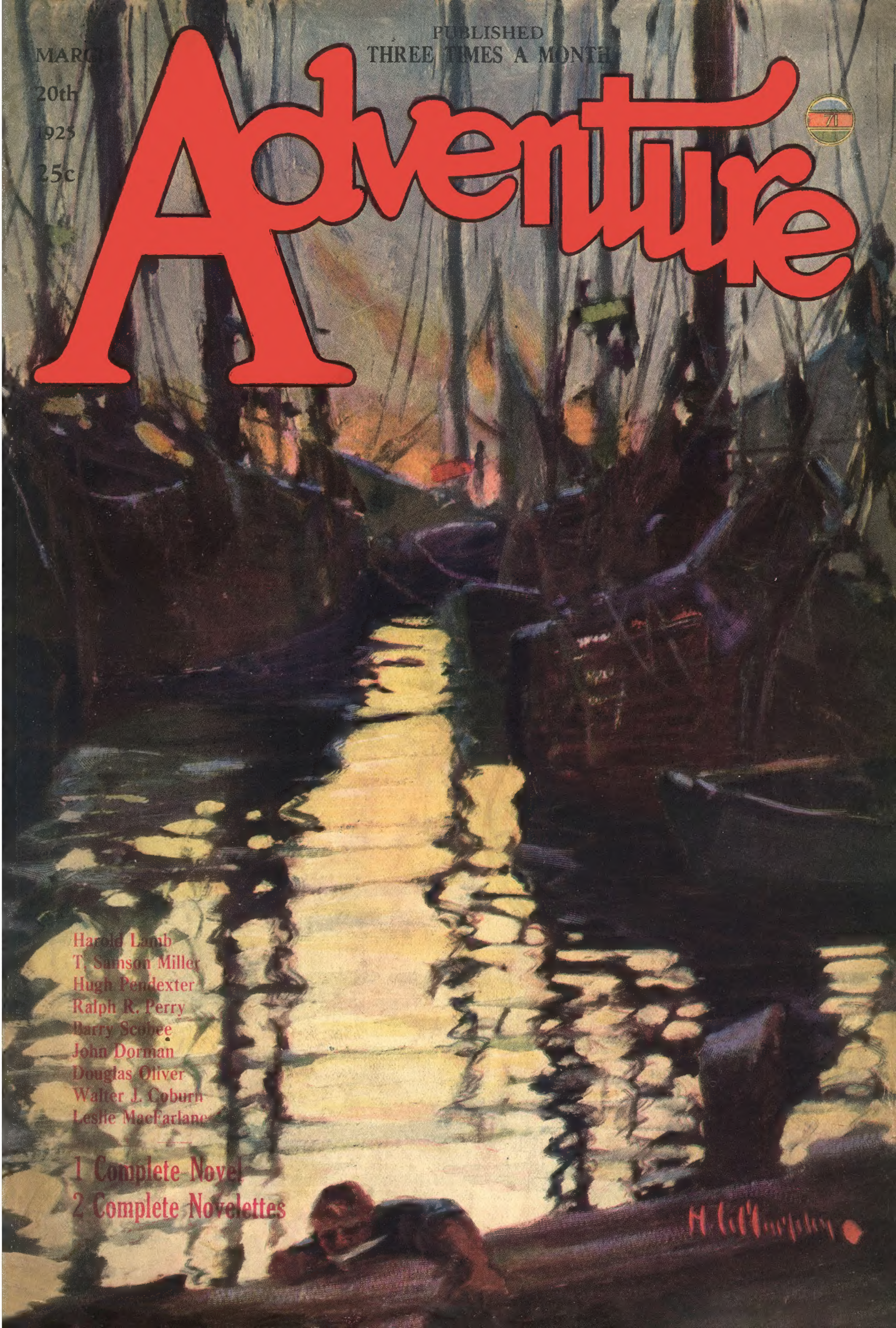
ADVENTURE

25 Cents

MARCH
20th
1925
25c

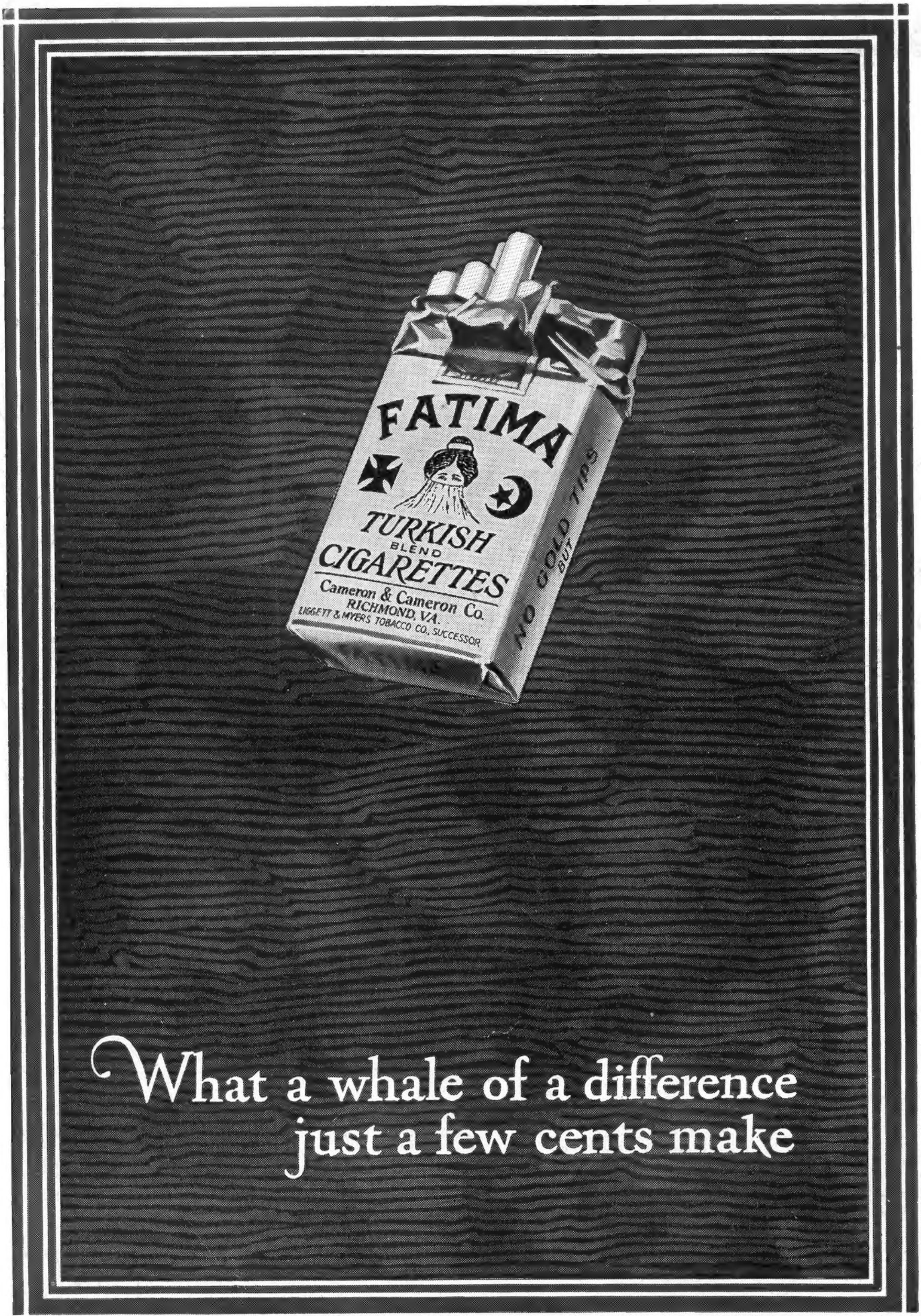
PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure



Harold Lamb
T. Samson Miller
Hugh Pendexter
Ralph R. Perry
Barry Scobee
John Dorman
Douglas Oliver
Walter J. Coburn
Leslie MacFarlane

1 Complete Novel
2 Complete Novelettes


FATIMA
TURKISH
BLEND
CIGARETTES
Cameron & Cameron Co.
RICHMOND, VA.
LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO., SUCCESSOR
NO GOLD TIPS
BUT
What a whale of a difference
just a few cents make

YOU Are Wanted for a Better Job

Roy C. Claflin, President

THAT was the good news they brought him just a few short months ago. Then he held an ordinary job, working long and hard on small pay. Today, he is a high salaried Draftsman, earning nearly $100 a week.

How did it happen?

It isn't a long story, because it's all so simple—so easy. You can do just what he has done, if you will start by reading every word of this ad, clear down to the coupon that marks your way to better pay.

It all started one evening while he was sitting at home reading. He saw the advertisement of the Columbia School of Drafting and he knew it was his opportunity to earn $50 to $100 a week in an uncrowded field with a big, sure future. He sent in the coupon. Later he enrolled for the Columbia course. Today he's making real money. His brain is working as well as his hands. He's standing on the threshold of a successful future, with all that it means—independence—money—success—happiness.

$275 Extra in 3 Days

He recently received $275 for one drawing that he made in spare time in three days.

But he isn't the only one. In just a few months time we boosted one man's pay from $2.00 a day to over $300 a month—another now makes as high as $27.00 a day—another man, after securing our help, went into business for himself and today that business is paying him over $50,000 a year.

How About You? Do you make money like these men do? Are you working up hill or down? Count the money in your pay envelope next pay day. You'll find the answer there.

Make $50 to $100 a Week

Columbia will train you to be an expert Draftsman in your spare time at home by mail. There's lots of room for you if you act now.

Promotion Is Quick

We'll qualify you for a high salaried position in the Drafting field and keep you in touch with openings for Draftsmen in the big machine shops, industrial plants and United States Government Departments. Men who start as Draftsmen are often advanced to Chief Draftsmen, Chief Engineers, Production Managers, and so on.

Get the Right Training

Mr. Roy C. Claflin, the founder and director, stands personally in back of the Columbia School of Drafting. You spend no time in long-winded theories—useless and expensive to you. You start on actual drawing work the day you receive your first lesson.

You Need No Previous Training

The course is easy to understand and easy to follow. Many students secure big paying positions even before they complete the course.

Success Calls Men of Action Only

If you are a man of action—clip the coupon now and show that you are. Keep right on top of this opportunity to make real money. Don't go looking for a pair of scissors. Tear the coupon off and mail it right now. Get started today.

What We Give You

FREE BOOK. Send in the coupon today. I will immediately send you our book "Drafting—Your Success" which tells about Drafting and its opportunities and contains proof that I can raise your pay.

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS. You will be carefully coached in practical Drafting work.

I HELP YOU GET A JOB. I will help you get a position as a practical Draftsman and will give you real, personal help, such as I have given to thousands of others.

PERSONAL INSTRUCTION and Supervision throughout the Course. You will receive the personal instruction and help of Roy C. Claflin, President of the Columbia School of Drafting and a practical Draftsman of many years' experience.

DRAFTSMAN'S EQUIPMENT. I will furnish you with a full set of first-class drawing equipment and Drafting instruments, as shown in the picture below, after you enroll. You keep both sets on completing the course.

CONSULTATION PRIVILEGES. You are free to write me at any time for personal advice and suggestions regarding your progress.

DIPLOMA. The diploma I will give you on completing the course attests to your proficiency as a Draftsman. It is an entering wedge to success.

ADVICE REGARDING GOVERNMENT POSITIONS. The following are a few of the many positions open in the Government Departments from time to time. The salaries are starting salaries, subject to increase:

Architectural Designer—$4,000 a year. Chief Draftsman, Naval Aircraft Factory—$15.04 a day. Aeronautical Draftsman, Field Service, Navy Department—$5.20 to $12.50 a day.

We will advise you as to other government openings from time to time.

COLUMBIA SCHOOL OF DRAFTING
ROY C. CLAFLIN, President
Dept. G-123 14th and T Sts., N. W. WASHINGTON, D. C.

FREE DRAFTING OUTFIT

We give you Free, with our course, this Professional Drafting Outfit of high-grade instruments, equipment and supplies. It is yours to keep when you complete the course.

FREE BOOK COUPON

COLUMBIA SCHOOL OF DRAFTING
Dept. G-123, 14th and T Sts., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Please send me without charge your free illustrated book on Drafting, telling me how I can secure your complete home study course and your help in securing a position as Draftsman.

Name ....

Address ....

City ....State ....

ADVENTURE
March 20, 1925

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 51
Number 5

Prest-O-Lite

Powerful life—*at the most remarkable battery values ever offered*

A TOUCH on the starter—and the coldest engine jumps into life! Action! A loud, cheerful horn. Bright, white lights!

These are the first things you notice when a Prest-O-Lite Battery powers the electric system of your car. And next—a long, repair-free life that simply eliminates battery worries!

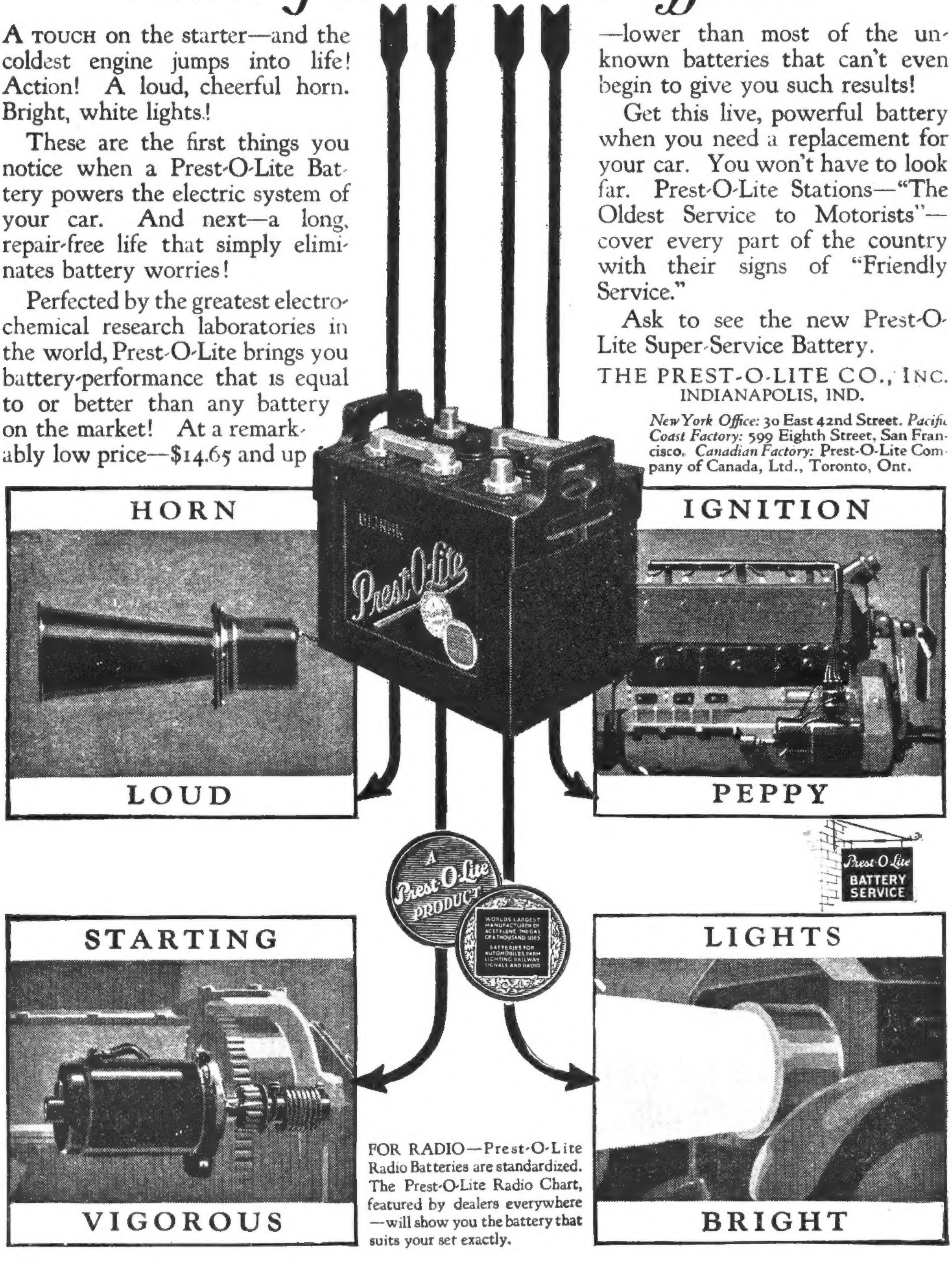
Perfected by the greatest electrochemical research laboratories in the world, Prest-O-Lite brings you battery-performance that is equal to or better than any battery on the market! At a remarkably low price—$14.65 and up—lower than most of the unknown batteries that can't even begin to give you such results!

Get this live, powerful battery when you need a replacement for your car. You won't have to look far. Prest-O-Lite Stations—"The Oldest Service to Motorists"—cover every part of the country with their signs of "Friendly Service."

Ask to see the new Prest-O-Lite Super-Service Battery.

THE PREST-O-LITE CO., INC.
INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

New York Office: 30 East 42nd Street. *Pacific Coast Factory:* 599 Eighth Street, San Francisco. *Canadian Factory:* Prest-O-Lite Company of Canada, Ltd., Toronto, Ont.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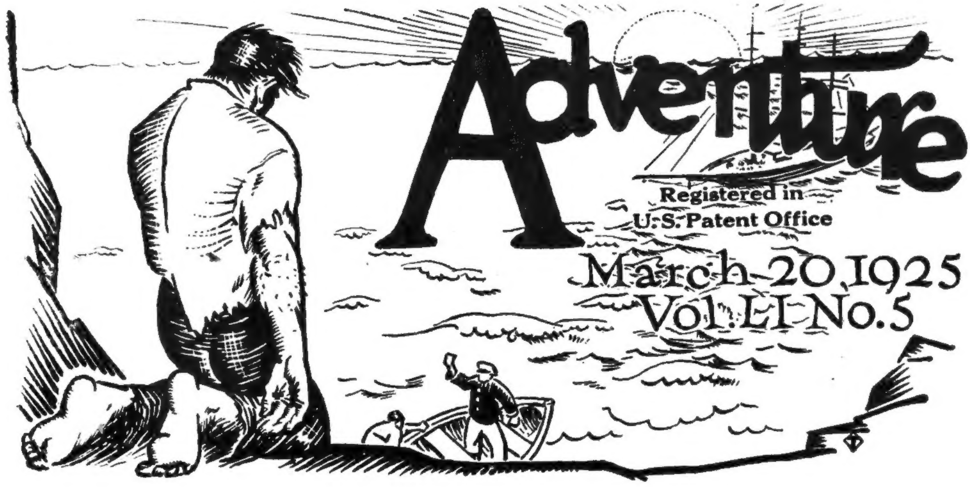
LOUD
IGNITION
PEPPY
Prest-O-Lite
A Prest-O-Lite PRODUCT
WORLDS LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF ACETYLENE THE GAS OF A THOUSAND USES
BATTERIES FOR AUTOMOBILES FARM LIGHTING RAILWAY SIGNALS AND RADIO
Prest-O-Lite
BATTERY SERVICE
STARTING
VIGOROUS
LIGHTS
BRIGHT

FOR RADIO—Prest-O-Lite Radio Batteries are standardized. The Prest-O-Lite Radio Chart, featured by dealers everywhere—will show you the battery that suits your set exactly.



Published Three Times a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York, N. Y.
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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for March 20th, 1925, Issue

The Snow Driver *A Complete Novel* . . . . . . Harold Lamb 1
Lapland—the "*Fox*" and a forged map.

Native Born . . . . Barry Scobee 62
Pacific—hijacker bullets and Yankee blood.

The War Cats of Dugan O'Day *A Complete Novelette* . . John Dorman 72
Florida Coast—they knew how to scratch.

The Grotesques of N'gibbidi . . . . Thomas Samson Miller 85
Africa—the struggle for the tin concession.

The Bush Lopers *A Five-Part Story Part III* . . . . Hugh Pendexter 95
Border Colonies—on to Detroit with the *coureurs de bois.*

Fowl Tactics . . . . Douglas Oliver 127
Western Front—the Canadians craved duck.

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from preceding page)

Deuce High . . . . **Walter J. Coburn** 136
West—every one wanted to run the gantlet.

Close-in Lands of Adventure *Places of Interest* . . **Raymond S. Spears** 145

The Atlantic Takes a Hand . . . . **Ralph R. Perry** 146
Sea—there was a smuggled stone aboard.

The River Trail ***A Complete Novelette*** . . . . . . **Leslie McFarlane** 153
Canada—*Moon's* whisky *blanc* was bad for the Indians.

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 178

Camp-Fire Stations 184

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 185

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 185

Ask Adventure 186
A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising sixty-seven geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American, Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

Lost Trails 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **R. Tandler**

Cover Design . . . . **H. C. Murphy**

One Complete Novel and Two Complete Novelettes

"*HASHKNIFE" HARTLEY* had rheumatism. To cure it he and "*Sleepy" Stevens* visited the hot springs at Hawk Hole; but they stayed to clear up more than their own troubles. "HIDDEN BLOOD," by W. C. Tuttle, is a complete novel of the West in the next issue.

RUSSIA'S hold upon Alaska was in the balance; *Kolosh* and *Aleut*, Hawaiian hostages and convicts were ready to revolt, when *Yanovsky* disobeyed orders and set out in search of the lost *Bobrik* and its million-ruble cargo of furs. What he found is told in "TYRO AND TYRANT," a complete novelette by William Byron Mowery, in the next issue.

WHEN a white man falls so low that even the natives scorn him, when he is a prey to the incantations of the village witch-doctor, one thing and one thing only can redeem him—his pride. "OUT OF THE JUNGLE" is a complete novelette, by Gordon MacCreagh in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

How Long Do You Expect To Live?

Make your own answer. It's up to you. I know you might be hit on the head with a brick or have someone push you off the end of a dock. But barring accidents, what then? If you take care of any piece of machinery it will last for years—abuse it and you might as well cash it in after the first year. This is just as true of your own body.

If you do—you die

Go ahead with your careless living if you want. Eat and drink what you like. Abuse your body—it's yours to do with as you please. You may think you're having a good time. But are you? You get up in the morning feeling half dead. You drag yourself through the day and before it's half over you are drowsy and lagging. Get wise to yourself. Don't you know your body is clogging up with poison? Don't you know your lungs are starving for oxygen? Don't you realize your inner cells are breaking down and you are not doing a thing to replenish them? You're dying, man—and you don't know it.

I add years to your life

You need exercise. You must have it. Tie your arm to your side and it will wither away—but use your muscles and you have more muscle to use. The same is true throughout your entire body. Every vital organ is completely surrounded with muscles which make these organs function. Exercise and you strengthen the organ itself. You wear down the dead tissue or cells. The white corpuscles of your blood carry it off and the red corpuscles supply new healthy tissue. You drive death and disease out and bring new life to a worn down and famished body.

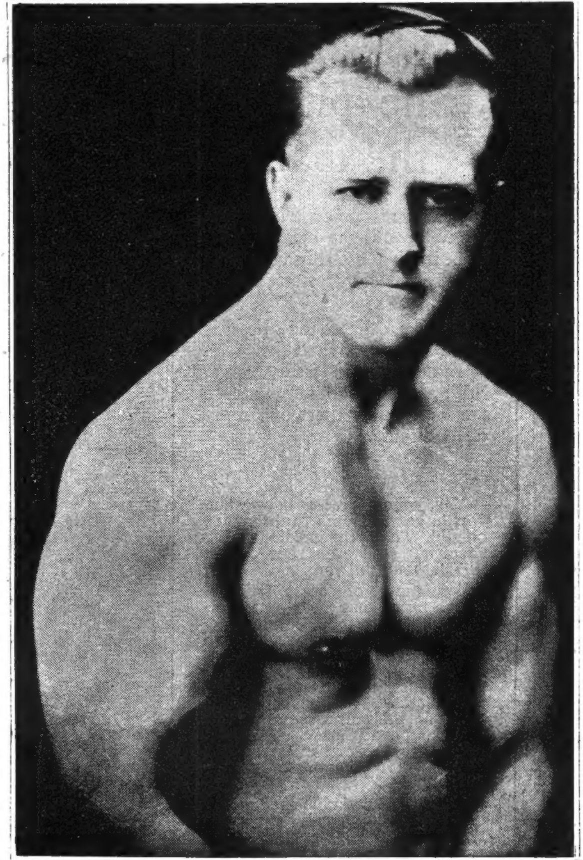
You need a teacher

Just any kind of exercise won't do. I have had men come to me who were literally broken down from work in factory or mill. With scientific instruction I brought their body back to strength and power.

My system has been tried and proven. It never fails. Some claim, eh? Well, it's true. I don't care what your present condition is. I want you to say: "I'm ready," and I'll knock those microbes in you higher than a cocked hat. I'll shoot you so full of life you'll think you swallowed a stick of dynamite. And muscle? That's my middle name. In three months' time I'll build up every muscle in your body. I'll broaden those shoulders and deepen your chest so that every breath will bring deep loads of oxygen to your lungs, purifying your blood and shooting a thrill throughout your entire system. I'll brighten your eyes and clear your skin. I'll make you so full of life you will feel like shouting out to the world: "I'm a man and I can prove it."

And remember, fellows, I don't just promise these things—I guarantee them. Do you doubt me? Make me prove it. That's what I like, because I know I can do it.

Come on then. Snap into it. Are you ready? Let's go!



EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
The Muscle Builder

Send for my new 64-page book

"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

It Is Free

It contains forty-five full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Many of these are leaders in their business professions today. I have not only given them a body of which to be proud, but made them better doctors, lawyers, merchants, etc. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is ten cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send today—right now, before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 5003, 305 Broadway, New York City

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN,
Dept. 5003, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—I enclose herewith 10 cents, for which you are to send me, without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." (Please write or print plainly.)

Name...

Street..

City.............................State...............

She pitied the man

YET she couldn't love him nor could she bring herself to be frank and tell him honestly why she didn't welcome his attentions.

On the other hand, he was quite an attractive fellow who intrigued her in many ways. Still, as you well know, there are some things that you simply can't discuss.

* * *

You, yourself, rarely know when you have halitosis (unpleasant breath). That's the insidious thing about it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle. It is an interesting thing that this well known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these unusual properties as a breath deodorant.

Test the remarkable deodorizing effects of Listerine this way: Rub a little onion on your fingers. Then apply Listerine and note how quickly the onion odor disappears.

This safe and long-trusted antiseptic has dozens of different uses; note the little circular that comes with every bottle. Your druggist sells Listerine in the original brown package only—*never in bulk.* There are three sizes: three ounce, seven ounce, and fourteen ounce. Buy the large size for economy.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

For HALITOSIS use LISTERINE

LISTERINE Throat Tablets, containing the antiseptic oils of Listerine, are now available . . While we frankly admit that no tablet or candy lozenge can correct halitosis, the Listerine antiseptic oils in these tablets are very valuable as a relief for throat irritations — 25 cents.

25% Natural Bran

is only one of the advantages of

The New Pettijohn's

WHOLE WHEAT CEREAL

ONCE start your family with the New Pettijohn's and you never have to argue again to get them to eat bran.

Nearly everybody relishes the New Pettijohn's—and whenever they eat this delicious, hot, whole-wheat cereal they get 25 per cent Natural Wheat Bran.

Every dish of the New Pettijohn's gives you valuable Mineral Salts and Vitamines, too.

The New Pettijohn's is selected Whole Wheat—one of the most digestible and nourishing of all the kinds of grain.

It is pre-cooked, processed to develop the flavor, rolled, and delicately toasted. It cooks *through* and *through* in 3 to 5 minutes.

When it comes to the table it is not only hot but *fresh*.

Eat the New Pettijohn's with good top-milk or cream.

It makes a generous, grateful breakfast—oftentimes a welcome change for luncheon—and a nourishing hot supper for growing children.

The flavor is something to be grateful for.

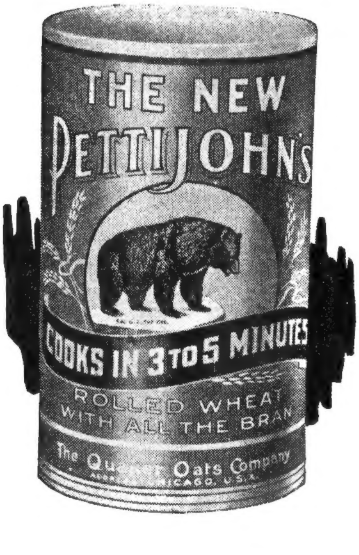
TRY IT—TASTE IT—TELL YOUR FRIENDS

At your Grocer's—a Generous Package

1 Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes.

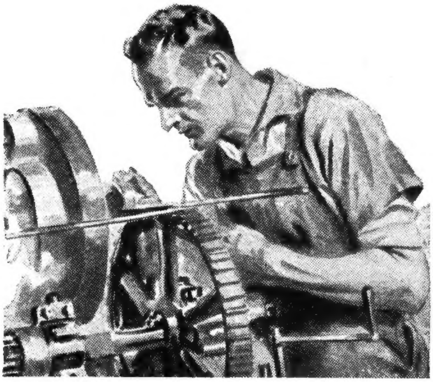
2 The pick of America's Wheat—contains 25% Natural Bran, with essential Vitamines and Mineral Salts.

3 A new and delicious Flavor brought out by pre-cooking.



The Quaker Oats Company

CHICAGO, U.S.A.



He's Patented Four Inventions

AND he's only one of scores of inventors who got their first real start through spare-time study with the International Correspondence Schools.

Jesse G. Vincent, Vice President of the Packard Motor Car Company, inventor of the Packard Twin Six and co-inventor of the Liberty Motor, is a former I. C. S. student.

So is John C. Wahl, inventor of the Wahl Adding Machine and the Eversharp Pencil; W. E. Hallett, inventor of the Hallett Tandem Gas Engine; H. E. Doerr, Chief Mechanical Engineer, Scullin Steel Company, and W. J. Libby, inventor of the Libby Mine Hoist Controller.

HERE'S the same coupon—the same opportunity that these men had. There's still a chance for you to get ahead if you will only make the start.

One hour after supper each night, spent with the International Correspondence Schools in the quiet of your own home, will prepare you for the position you want in the work you like best.

Yes, it will! Put it up to us to prove it. Without cost or obligation, just mark and mail this coupon.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2006-E, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an **X**:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

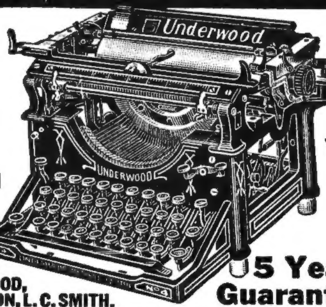
☐ Business Management
☐ Industrial Management
☐ Personnel Organization
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Business Law
☐ Banking and Banking Law
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Private Secretary
☐ Spanish ☐ French
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Advertising
☐ Better Letters
☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Business English
☐ Civil Service
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Common School Subjects
☐ High School Subjects
☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering
☐ Electric Lighting
☐ Mechanical Engineer
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Railroad Positions
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ Civil Engineer
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Metallurgy
☐ Steam Engineering
☐ Radio
☐ Architect
☐ Architects' Blue Prints
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Automobile Work
☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Navigation
☐ Agriculture and Poultry
☐ Mathematics

Name...
Street Address.. 3-6-24
City.............................State..............................
Occupation..

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.



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A Year to Pay

Yes, lowest prices on **UNDERWOOD, REMINGTON, L. C. SMITH, ROYAL,** and all standard makes on easiest terms ever offered. Re-manufactured like new by the famous **"Young Process"** to give a lifetime of service.

5 Years Guarantee

10 Days Trial Our liberal "direct from factory plan" **saves half.** You actually use the typewriter 10 days without obligation to buy. Let us prove we have the greatest typewriter bargains ever offered. You actually **save from $40 to $50.**

Big Illustrated Catalog FREE

This interesting valuable book explains fully how "Young Process of Re-Manufacturing" guarantees you highest quality, perfect service and satisfaction. **Rush coupon today to**

YOUNG TYPEWRITER CO., (Est. 1911)

SEND COUPON NOW

Young Typewriter Co., Dept. 1523, 654 W. Randolph St., Chicago

Send me Free book and Special Reduced Prices. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name...
Address..
City.............................*State*...................

Make *Your* Dreams Come True

Join the P. H. Davis force of profit-making Tailoring Salesmen

You men who want to realize your ambitions—consider the P. H. Davis tailoring line. Hundreds of salesmen making fine incomes—steadily—taking orders for Davis $29.50 made-to-measure suits and overcoats. Davis clothes have nation-wide reputation for quality. First sales and repeat orders come easy.

SUCCEED with Davis $29.50 Quality Clothes

You can offer finest woolens, combined with high grade tailoring. Selling direct from factory to wearer, you save customers $10 and more on suit or overcoat. Satisfaction guaranteed or money returned. You make big commissions. Also liberal profit-sharing bonus on sales. To men who qualify, we furnish $40 selling outfit without charge. A chance to go into business for yourself.

What One Man Did

"Earned $300 first six days. Moved into my own home bought with Davis profits."
E. A. Stafford, Ohio.

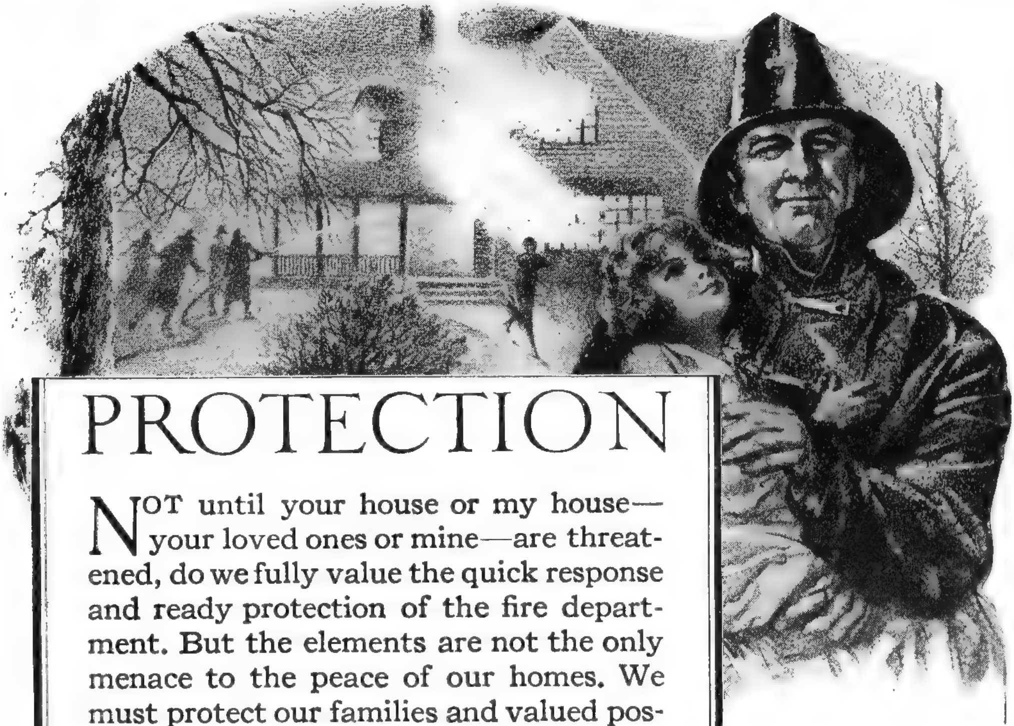
Write today for free book of facts. Address

THE P. H. DAVIS TAILORING CO.
Dept. 1-1 Cincinnati, Ohio

BROWN'S BRONCHIAL TROCHES

For Inflammation of the Throat, Coughs, Hoarseness

JOHN I. BROWN & SON, Boston, Mass.
H. F. Ritchie & Co., Inc., Sales Agents, New York.



PROTECTION

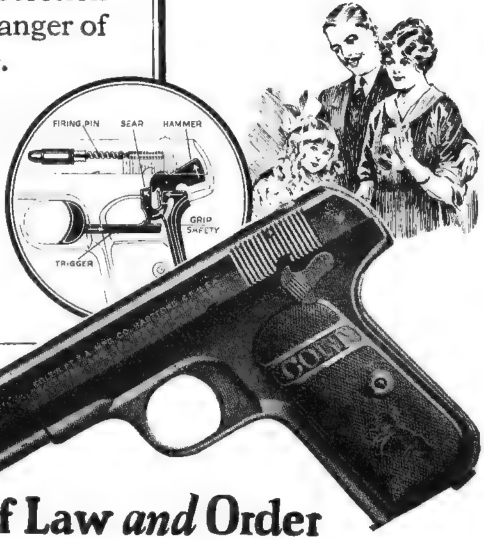
NOT until your house or my house—your loved ones or mine—are threatened, do we fully value the quick response and ready protection of the fire department. But the elements are not the only menace to the peace of our homes. We must protect our families and valued possessions from the lawless. Not until the depredations of these irresponsibles fall within our own experience do we rightly appreciate the protective presence of a Colt Revolver or Automatic Pistol.

A Colt inspires confidence in every member of your household. And it is mighty comforting to know that this protection is afforded without the slightest danger of mishap from accidental discharge.

Your dealer (or the new Colt Catalog) will explain this Colt Automatic Grip Safety

COLT'S PATENT FIRE ARMS MFG. CO.
HARTFORD, CONN.

Pacific Coast Representative
Phil. B. Bekeart Company
717 Market St., San Francisco, Calif.



COLT'S

The Arm of Law *and* Order

You were slender, too, when you were a bride!

Your memories of those happy days picture a graceful, slender girl—full of life, full of eagerness.

What has become of her? Has she taken on weight—lost her girlish figure—perhaps even become stout?

How needless a disaster! You can regain your youthful silhouette by using Marmola Tablets (thousands of men and women each year regain healthy, slender figures this way). No exercises or diets. Eat what you want, and get slender!

All drug stores have them—one dollar a box. Or they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid, by the Marmola Company, 1715 General Motors Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

MARMOLA

Prescription Tablets

The Pleasant Way to Reduce

ARTIST'S OUTFIT FREE

Write quick for our remarkable offer. Learn **NOW** at home, in spare time, by our new instruction method. Commercial Art, Cartooning, Illustrating, Designing. Delightful, fascinating work in big demand. **$50.00** paid for one drawing. Handsome book free explains everything.

SEND FOR IT TODAY

WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART, Inc.
Rm.1053C,1115-15thSt.N.W.,Washington,D.C.

Be the Man of the Hour **Make $24.00 a Day** selling "Jim" Foster finely tailored suits and topcoats at the low price of $12.50. **You make $3.00** on every order. "Jim" Foster Jr. clothes for boys 6 to 16 are also big sellers. Sell men's vests, too, and make additional profits. Write for samples and information now! Address "Jim," care of

"Jim" Foster Clothes, 2252 So. Spaulding Ave., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

PATENTS

Write for our free book

MUNN & CO. ESTABLISHED 1846
630 Woolworth Bldg., New York City

Free Trial

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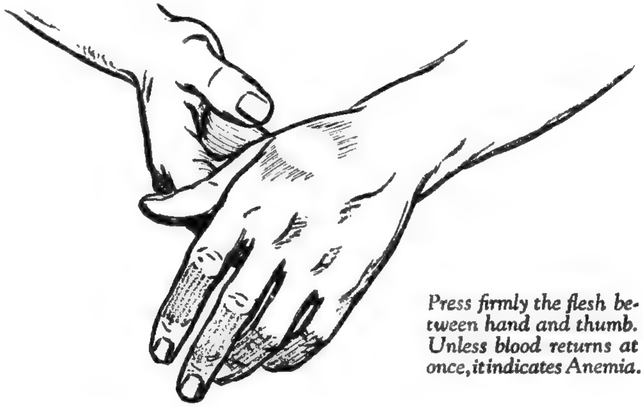

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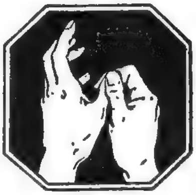
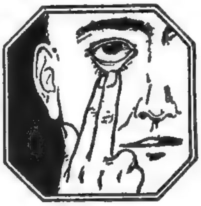


Squeeze the thumbnail hard. Unless it reddens again instantly, Anemia is indicated.



Pull down the lower eye-lid as illustrated. Unless the inner lid is a bright scarlet, Anemia may exist.

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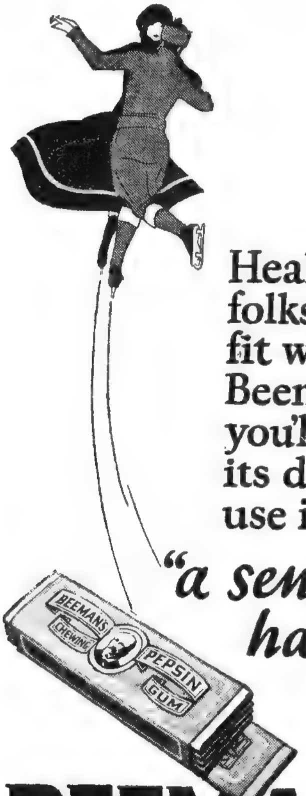

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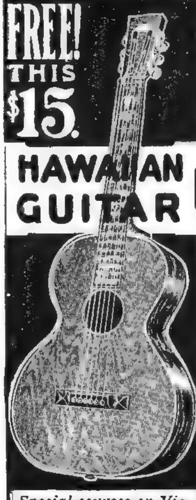

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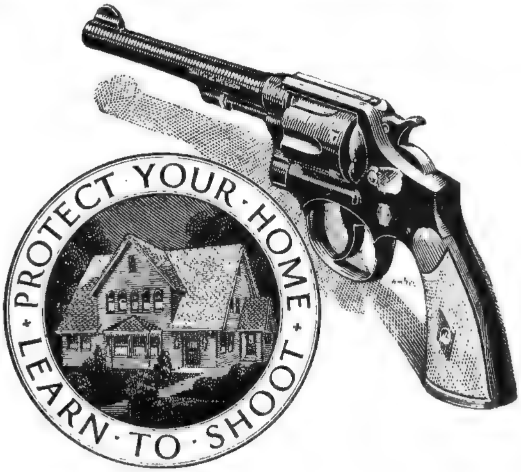

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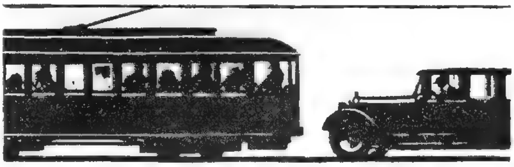

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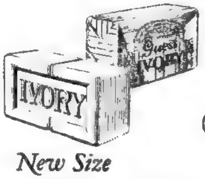

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March 20, 1925
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The Snow Driver

A Complete Novel by Harold Lamb

Author of "The Sword of Honor," "Forward," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE MAN-AT-ARMS

UPON a fair day in May, in token of the honor due them for long and valorous service in Flanders, a small group of men were chosen to mount guard at the pavilion of his Majesty King Edward the Sixth of England. They were armigers or esquires-at-arms, and the youngest of their company was placed at the entrance of the pavilion nearest the person of the king.

The name of this armiger was Ralph Thorne. He was selected for this post because, of these survivors of a gallant company, he had done the most in battle.

"Because, sire," explained the politic Dudley, Duke of Stratford, "he has never failed in the execution of a command. Because, being distant from the court and the eye of his sovereign, he has yet performed deeds of hardihood, suffering thereby sore scathe and wounds."

This tribute, lightly rendered by my lord duke, was remembered by him in latter years. Verily he had good reason to regret his words and his selection of a sentinel.

For there befell in that hour and in that day of the year 1553 a strange event. And here is the tale of it, justly set down, giving every man his due, and no man more; for it is not the task of the chronicler to praise and dispraise, but to make manifest the truth.

"The Snow Driver," copyright, 1925, by Harold Lamb.

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MASTER THORNE walked his post, after receiving signs and orders from my lord, the aforesaid Duke of Stratford. The armiger was not by much the elder of the boy king who lay within the pavilion on a couch covered with a deerskin. He wore the armor of the guards—cuirass and morion—and carried a harquebus on one shoulder.

A slow match in his other hand was kept alight by swinging gently back and forth. Walking slowly from one pole of the entrance to the other, he did not look within. And the grievously sick Edward took no more notice of the sentinel than of the ancient hag who crouched at the head of his divan, shredding herbs in her boney fingers.

Thorne's first hour of duty had not passed before a cannon roared from the river below the marquee. He had seen the flash before he heard it, and glanced keenly at four ships that were abreast the royal standard.

The court had removed that day from London town to the meadows of Greenwich on the lower Thames. Edward's pavilion was pitched nearest the shore. Across the stream was anchored a galleon that flew from its poop an ensign bearing the triangular cross of Spain.

This ship had entered the river some time since and the nobles in attendance on Edward remarked that it fired no salute when the king's standard was raised. This omission was set down to the absence of the captain or neglect or more probably to the intolerant pride of the Spaniards.

But the cannon had been fired from one of three vessels coming down the Thames. Ignorant as he was at that time of ships, Thorne saw only that they were merchant craft, stoutly built, no more than half the tonnage of the Spaniard. As they passed between him and the galleon he noticed that the mainmast of the leader came no higher than the Spaniard's mizzen.

The ship that had fired the salute bore an admiral's colors and devices painted on the after-castle, also on the wooden shields that lined the rail. From the green and white coloring, and the Cross of St. George on the banner, he knew that they were English.

"Are they come at last?" cried Edward from within. Raising himself on an elbow, he added eagerly. "I pray you of your courtesy Sir Squire, tell me what ships go out with the tide."

Turning about, Thorne lowered the muzzle of his harquebus to the earth and knelt.

"Three tall and goodly vessels, may it please your majesty, having the Tudor colors."

" 'Tis Sir Hugh's admiral ship," amended the duke who had come to the entrance to look out, "and the two consorts."

The boy on the couch tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the river, and sank back with a sigh. Under his transparent skin blue veins showed. Then a sudden attack of coughing sent a flush even to his forehead. The duke who was the only noble in attendance, hastened to the old woman and took a cup from her hand, pressing it upon his royal patient.

"Nay, Dudley, nay—" Edward coughed — "I am better without these drafts. So, doth Sir Hugh truly fare forth into the sea?"

"Sir Hugh Willoughby—" the chamberlain bowed— "and Master Richard Chancellor have weighed anchor. You will remember, sire—" he ran on officiously— "that they are resolved to seek a passage to Cathay and the new world, America. They will lay their course to the northeast, endeavoring to sail beyond the Christian shores, through the Ice Sea and so south to Cathay."

"Faith, my lord duke," smiled the king "the Spaniards and Portugals have left us nowhither else to sail. The Pope at Rome hath divided the known world between them."[*]

A fanfare of trumpets at the shore acknowledged the salute, and Edward lifted his head impatiently.

"Am I not to see them? I warrant you, 'tis a brave sight. Sir Squire, thou'rt stout and stalwart; can'st bear our poor body from this tent?"

"That can I," cried the armiger quickly, and would have laid aside his harquebus, but hesitated.

Edward was ever quick to read the thoughts of those who were near him. He studied the sentinel attentively, taking notice of the wide shoulders, the thews of neck and wrists, dwelling a second on the freckled, sunburned cheeks, still lean from convalescence.

---

[*] In the end of the fifteenth century the Pope decided the conflicting claims of the two monarchs in question by totaling 180 degrees of longitude to each.

Thorne was no more than eighteen, the king sixteen. Yet in the poise of the head, in the quick gray eyes of the squire-at-arms was manifest the surge of life and health.

"Your thoughts run to grave matters, good youth," Edward said at once. "You are charged to keep your post and weapon. Nay, lay it aside, at my bidding."

Thorne bowed and placed his firelock against the pavilion wall. Then, advancing to the couch, he put an arm under Edward's knees and shoulders and lifted him easily. The slight form of the sick boy in its black velvet cassock seemed no weightier than straw.

At the entrance the king urged him to go forward a few paces so that he could look up and down the river.

"Look, Dudley," Edward cried, "the Spaniard overtops Sir Hugh's ship."

"But yonder craft from Seville," the noble pointed out, "is a galleon fashioned for war. The ships that bear the colors of your majesty were built for the merchant adventures."

"Then, Dudley," cried the boy, "they were stanchly built of seasoned and honest oak."

"True. In the time of your majesty's illustrious grandsire and good King Harry, your father—whom may God save and assoil—no three ships could be got together, but one would be Venetian and one Dutch."

He turned to wave back angrily the throng of soldiery and attendants that had presumed to draw near the pavilion, hoping for a word or a look from the sick boy who was beloved by kitchen knave and noble of the realm alike. Strict orders had been issued by Stratford and those who had the care of the king's person that no one should approach within arrow flight. For this reason the picked guards had been stationed.

BUT Edward's eyes were on the passing ships wistfully. Here were men faring from the known seas into the unknown. Here were ships built and furnished and manned in England, going forth to discover a new route to the Indies, to bring to England some part of the trade with Cathay and the new world that had swelled the power of Spain and Portugal.*

He watched the burly shipmen in their blue tabards, laboring at the oars of the boats that were towing the vessels. When they became aware of the king they roared out a cheer and pulled the harder. Others climbed up the shrouds to stare and wave a greeting, and a tall man on the poop of the last ship doffed his cap and bowed low.

"Now, by St. Martin," exclaimed Edward, "I should know that graybeard."

"Sire, your eyes are as keen as your memory is unfailing," responded Stratford after a moment's hesitation. "That venerable ship's captain is the notable navigant and cosmographer——"

"Sebastian Cabot, the Venetian. I know him well, Dudley. And my memory of which you prate tells me his age is fourfold my own. Yet is he strong and hale enough to——"

The boy's lips quivered and were silent. Thorne the armiger turned his head to gaze at a falcon hovering over the rushes on the far bank of the river, so that he might not behold his sovereign's distress.

"Sire?"

The duke bent closer, and pursed his thin lips.

"Master Cabot or Cabota," he added, "is indeed past his prime. 'Tis a mere courtesy that he stands on yonder deck. For-by he is governor of the Mystery and Company of Merchants-Adventurers, for the discovery of places and dominions unknown, he sails with the ships as far as the haven of Orfordnesse on the Suffolk coast. There Cabot leaves them. He is too aged to attempt the voyage into the Ice Sea. Ha, Sirrah Squire, bear your royal burden into the pavilion from which you should never have advanced. He is ailing!"

Edward was coughing, flecks of blood showing on his pallid lips. His eyes closed and he lay voiceless a moment on the couch. When he spoke it was in so low a whisper that nobleman and armiger both bent lower to catch the words—Thorne expecting that the king might have some command for him.

"Nay, Dudley. Of what avail to guard the body when life—itself is leaving me?"

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*De Gama, Albuquerque, Cortez and Magellan were opening up the gold and spice routes for rival princes. In this dawn of the age of discovery it was still believed that America lay near to Cathay. Cathay (China) had not been reached, and was thought to be the heart of the Indies.

With an effort he opened his eyes and made shift to smile. "My lungs are in consumption, the priests say. Good youth, we trust we have not wearied you. Edward will never again rise from his bed."

Both the listeners started. Thorne had heard frequently of the feebleness of the boy, although he had not looked to find him so wasted away. To hear that Edward expected to die was a shock. Few men were victors in the long battle with the white plague. Stratford took no pains to conceal his anger that the sentinel should have heard the words of the king.

"To your post!" he whispered, drawing the youth back from the couch, where Edward was wracked by another fit of coughing. "Keep your ears to yourself, or the provost's knife will e'en trim them to a proper size. Ha—your weapon has been taken."

The harquebus was not where Thorne had placed it, nor was it to be seen in the pavilion. He searched the tent with his eyes, and flushed hotly, realizing that he had allowed some one to steal his firelock while on duty.

He was more than a little puzzled as to how it had been done. The officers of the household and some soldiers had pressed to the entrance of the marquee when he carried Edward forth, but he had noticed no one step within. Perforce, he had not been able to watch the weapon while he stood outside.

Stratford, he knew, had not taken the harquebus. The hag by the bedside sat as before, fumbling with her herbs. Her wrinkled face, brown and dry as a withered apple, was empty of all expression. Certainly the firelock was not concealed under her kirtle.

"So you would make the gipsy the butt of your carelessness?" grunted the duke. "Have you aught to say, before I make a charge to your officers that you have suffered your arms to be taken from you while on duty?"

"I say this."

Thorne drew the sword that hung from its sling at his hip and took his station at the entrance.

"My lord, if any man seeks to cross my post unbidden he shall taste steel instead of lead."

"*Humph!* The young cock can crow. What more?"

The gray eyes of the youngster narrowed and he kept silence. Although the fault had not been his, he could make no explanation. Stratford, an experienced soldier and a martinet, had no reason to make a charge against him. The duke, however, was irritated by the appointment of the Flanders veterans over his own yeomen and the officers of the household.

"What more?" he repeated sharply.

The second question required an answer, and a bleak look overspread the countenance of the armiger, drawing sharp lines about eyes and chin.

"My lord of Stratford, the command of his Majesty was heard by your lordship. He bade me put down my weapon and carry him forth."

"Ha! Master Thorne you have yet to serve your apprenticeship as a bearer-of-arms at court. To gratify the whim of a boy you made naught of your orders. You were placed here not to act a playmate or to seek royal favor, but to guard the life of your prince. What if you had been attacked by yonder canaille? Body of me!"

This time Thorne kept silent. The nobleman's blame was unjust, but there was enough truth in it to make the armiger realise that his offense would be held unpardonable if Stratford chose to press a charge against him. True, he might appeal to the king who was honorary captain of the guards.

But Edward lay passive on his couch, forgetful of sentinel or nobleman.

Stratford paced the pavilion, hands thrust into his sword-belt, and came to a stop by Thorne. Seeing that Edward was asleep, he said in a whisper:

"When you are relieved, go to your quarters. Abide there without speaking to anybody of what you have seen or heard in this place. A soldier on duty," he added bruskly, "may not give out what has come under his eye on his post. Can you do that?"

IT WAS long after the armiger had left with his companions of the guard but without his firelock, that the Gipsy drew from beneath the couch where it had been hidden by the deerskin, the harquebus that she had stolen.

Unseen by Stratford and unnoticed by the new sentinel, she slipped the short weapon under her ragged mantle and slouched from the pavilion. She had stolen as naturally as a crow picks up something that catches its eye.

The superstition of high noblemen had invoked her to try to save the life of a dying ruler with her simples, and shrewder than they who had called her forth, she fled with what she could snatch before Edward should die.

Meanwhile the three ships had passed out of sight down the Thames, and out of the minds of the courtiers who talked of changes that were to come, and fortunes to be made and lost. But Edward still dwelt upon the glimpse he had had of the voyagers.

CHAPTER II

THE SIGNIOR D'ALABER

MY LORD of Stratford sat late at table the evening he summoned Ralph Thorne to his quarters and looked long upon the flagon, both Rhenish and Burgundy. He had a hard, gray head for drink. It helped him make decisions, a vexatious necessity of late.

In a long chamber gown he sat at his ease, a pair of barnacles on his nose and a book printed in the new manner from black letters on his knees. My lord had excellent eyesight and did not need the spectacles; and, although he was not scholar enough to read the book, he firmly believed that it was a mistake to be found doing nothing.

"Master Thorne," he greeted the armiger, "there is a saying— *Quis custodiat ipsos custodies?* Who shall watch the watchmen themselves?"

He put aside the volume and cleared his throat.

"I have been at some pains to learn who you are."

Thorne bowed acknowledgement in silence. He had no patron at court, and the duke was powerful. He had entered upon his duties in the guards with high hopes. In the camps over the sea the name and character of the boy king had aroused the loyalty of the lads who were beginning their military service in the petty wars of the lowlands and they had waited anxiously for the time when they could appear at their own court.

Now, lacking any one to take his part, and with Edward unapproachable, a word from Stratford could disgrace him or restore him to honest service.

"Your father, sirrah, is Master Robert Thorne who once rendered yeoman aid to his country by bringing out of Spain a *mappamundi** faithfully drawn. He is known as the Cosmographer, and he dwells on the coast at Orfordnesse."

Again the squire bowed assent.

"You have a reputation. 'Tis said you use a sword like a fiend out of ——, which is to say with skill but little forethought. You have been in more broils than any dozen of your fellows. Once, I hear, you presumed to go forth alone in the guise of a wherryman. So habited you ventured rashly to row armed men across a river within the hostile camp."

"My lord, we had need of information."

"So it was said. But you forgot your part of a spy and fought a knight of the Burgundian party in the skiff. The matter ended with your placing the Burgundian adrift, fully armed as he was, a nosegay in his hands and candles lighted at his head. In this guise he was discovered by his friends who buried the body."

"'Twas fairly fought between us, my lord, in the boat. He had the worst. It would have been foul shame to throw an honorable foeman into the water."

The man at the table paused to snuff the candles that stood on either hand and to glance curiously at the youth, his visitor. To draw steel on an adversary in full armor in a small skiff was a thing seldom done, and Thorne had not despoiled the body.

"Stap my vitals!" he laughed. "You have a queer head on you. Now thank Sts. Matthew and Mark and your patron of that fellowship that it has pleased Edward to stand your friend."

Thorne flushed with pleasure and strode forward to the table.

"Grant me but the chance to serve the king's majesty!"

"*Humph!* As a spy you are not worth your salt. But the king is minded to send you upon a mission."

He glanced upward fleetingly and saw only eagerness in the boy's clear eyes.

"You have learned to handle your sword, but not to handle men. You will want seasoning. The king is pleased to lay command upon you to journey to

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*Map of the world.

Orfordnesse and there await the setting out of Sir Hugh's fleet. Do aught that within you lies to aid Sir Hugh in his venture. Your prince hath the matter much at heart.

"Take a horse from my stables, and here—" Stratford signed to one of his servitors who stood by the buffet—"is a small purse for your needs."

Thorne, who had not one silver piece to jingle against another, accepted the gift with a bow.

Stratford hesitated, then rose and came around the table.

"Hark in your ear, young sir. The Spaniards who hold the sea would be well pleased to spoil this venture of Sir Hugh's. Watch your fellow travelers well upon the road and keep your sword loosened in scabbard. Be silent as to this mission, and hasten not back, but return at leisure with Master Cabot. Greet your father well for me."

"A good night to you, my lord. And accept the thanks of the Thornes."

Stratford smiled.

"Body o' me! 'Tis said the Thornes are more generous with blows than thanks. A good night, young sir."

He waited until the armiger had left the room, then went to the door and, closing it, shot home the bolt himself. Idly he turned the hour glass in which the sands had run out.

"Another hour brings other guests. Well, 'tis an easy road to a boy's heart to promise him danger i' the wind. Paul—" he nodded at the servant— "have in D'Alaber and his cozening friend. And," he added under his breath, "may your sainted namesake grant that young Thorne's wit be dull as his sword point is sharp."

THE two men who entered the cabinet of my lord Duke of Stratford were dressed in the height of fashion, and one, who wore a doublet of green silk, who bore in his left hand a high crowned and plumed hat, bowed with all the grace of an accomplished courtier, his cloak draped over the end of a long Spanish rapier. He had the small features of a woman, utterly devoid of color.

"Ah, signior," exclaimed Stratford as soon as the door closed upon Paul, "you are behind your time. I have been awaiting your ship this se'nnight."

"From the secrecy with which I am received," responded the young D'Alaber in excellent English, "it would seem that I am before my time."

And, turning his back rudely on his host he walked up to a long Venetian mirror, fingering the ruff at his throat.

"Is the Fox in London, my lord?" he demanded, turning sharply on Stratford, his sleepy eyes downcast yet missing no shade of expression in the nobleman.

"Renard has taken coach to Orfordnesse."

"And why?"

"Signior," said Stratford slowly, and more respectfully than the younger man of lesser rank had addressed him, "who knows? Perhaps the Fox prefers not to be in London when—if——"

"Edward dies," amended the Spaniard coolly.

The duke started and glanced uneasily at the closed door. Then he poured out with his own hand a measure of Burgundy into a gold goblet on the table. This he offered to D'Alaber who glanced at it quizzically and waited until he was certain that his host would drink from the same flagon.

"To the happy alliance between our two peoples!" cried Stratford, gulping down his wine. "Nay, do you fancy the goblet, D'Alaber? Then, I pray you, keep the thing."

The Spaniard turned it in his fingers indifferently and handed it to the other man, who made less ado about thrusting it into the breast of his robe, first weighing it in his great fist covetously.

He wore the dull damask of a merchant, yet his sword with its inlaid hilt was costly. He stood utterly still—and few men can do that—looking down from his looming height on the two noblemen as if he were the solitary spectator of a rare play.

And, in reality, he was attending upon a discussion only too common in these eventful days, wherein the fate of England rested in the balance. While Cornelius Durforth and D'Alaber sat on either hand, Stratford talked feverishly, giving the Spaniard the tidings of what was passing in the court, and at the same time justifying himself.

Edward was dying. Stratford and certain other officers of the royal household had contrived to keep this secret until now. And secrecy they must have to gain time to raise their liegemen on land and sea and discover who was of their party.

Stratford and the Papists of the kingdom supported Lady Mary, the elder sister of the king. She was daughter of Catharine of Aragon, the first wife of the late king, Henry the Eighth.

Others of the Protestant nobles favored the Lady Jane Grey, or the young Princess Elizabeth. But Elizabeth had inherited her father's love of hawking and the chase and carelessness of affairs of state. Meanwhile Parliament, ignorant of the true condition of the king, did nothing. A few weeks, and the Papist nobles near London would have enough swords to cut down all opposition to Lady Mary.

"And the king?" D'Alaber asked thoughtfully. "No one suspects his evil case?"

"No one," nodded the duke, "save ——"

"Ah. It was your part, my lord duke, to draw a veil around his sinking."

The Spaniard spoke courteously, but his words were like dagger pricks.

"A chuckle-headed squire—a niddering—a nobody overheard Edward make lament that his time was drawing to an end."

"And you?"

"I sent the youth on a bootless errand to Orfordnesse, saying that it was Edward's will. Nay, he will not set foot in London again till all is over."

"And there you blundered, my lord. Only one physic will keep a tongue from wagging. His name and time of setting forth?"

"The lad is Master Thorne of Orfordnesse. On the morrow at dawn he hies him hence."

"Then—" D'Alaber tapped a lean finger on the hilt of his poinard and glanced at Durforth, whose eyes, so dark that they appeared to be without expression, were fixed on him reflectively—"we must try phlebotemy, a trifle of blood letting. And now, messers, I deliver me of my charge."

Unfastening one of the laces of his doublet, he drew out two papers folded and sealed with the royal signet of Spain. These he handed to Durforth who looked at the seal and thrust them into his wallet. Stratford seemed afire with curiosity as to the nature of these papers, but D'Alaber vouchsafed him no satisfaction. Durforth, however, spoke up, twisting powerful fingers in his black beard!

"My lord Duke, you are now one of us; you must run with the hounds now, not with the hare. In your presence I have received from his august majesty, Charles, Emperor of Spain, a letter of commission. The other missive I understand to be a matter of state to be delivered when the voyage hath achieved its end."

The duke filled his goblet moodily, chafing inwardly at the insolence of the Spaniard. He could not do without their aid, but he found that their countryman Renard, advisor to Princess Mary, was taking the leadership from him. Stratford knew there was in England at that time a man who was called the Fox by those who had dealings with him; who had caused to be slain secretly some of the nobles who opposed Mary. And he suspected that this Fox was Renard the philosopher.

Stratford knew that another conspiracy was in the wind. Durforth, who had in past years been a merchant of Flanders and the North Sea, had been seen in company with Renard. Durforth, alone of the navigators, knew the coast of Norway. So he had been chosen by the council of Cabot's merchant-adventurers to go with Sir Hugh Willoughby as master of one of the three ships.

Of traffic and discoveries my lord of Stratford recked little. He wondered fleetingly why D'Alaber and Renard set such importance on the voyage of Sir Hugh. He had spoken truly to Ralph Thorne when he declared that the Spaniards would like to make an end of Sir Hugh and his ships. And why were they giving letters to Durforth to bear upon this voyage?

Aloud he said to the merchant—

"Your dallying here hath aroused no suspicion?"

"Not a jot," responded Durforth with his usual bluntness, "thanks to gaffer Cabot. The old cockatrice was afire to sail with Sir Hugh as far as Orfordnesse. So I yielded my place to him and will strike across the country to that haven with D'Alaber."

"Who will return to London," put in Stratford meaningly, "in the train of Princess—shall we say, Queen Mary?"

D'Alaber's dark eyes lighted with some amusement.

"*Senores, porque se tardo tanto*—why this beating about the bush? Nay, it shall be Mary future wife of Philip of Spain, King of England."

"*What?*" cried the nobleman, the blood rushing to his brow. "Now by my soul and honor, that will never be. Your emperor's dark-faced brat will not be King of England!"

"Mary," made answer D'Alaber, heedless

of the other's surprize and wrath, "is ill favored and shrewish. She hath overpassed thirty years and dotes on Philip, who is yet willing to have her for his bride. I see no hindrance to the match."

"But the men of England—Parliament ——"

"Will not take kindly at first to a nobler monarch than the Tudor lineage can show. But Mary will have her way, and you of the court have gone too far to draw back, unless you would care to make your excuses to the Fox."

"'Tis the fable of Master Æsop come true," grunted Durforth, who cared little about matters of state, so he was permitted to trade as he listed. "The gentry who were weary of King Log called for King Stork and had sorrow thereby."

"*Por estas honradas barbas!*" cried D'Alaber, drawing himself up in his first flash of temper. "You rovers* and cloth pedlers have no wit to see where power lies. Philip will be monarch of Spain before many years."

He swept his hand about the bare rush-floored chamber of his host.

"Instead of on this filth, you will walk on the carpets of Araby and these foul walls will be covered with the silks of Cathay. Your table will bear its spices, which now it lacks. For—" his eloquent voice rang with the arrogance of one schooled in a militant and conquering court—"you will be allied to the master of Christiandom, to Charles, Emperor of the Romans, King of Spain, Germany and the Two Sicilies. Lord of Jerusalem and Hungary, Archduke of Austria, and Duke of Burgundy and Brabant, Earl of Flanders, and——"

One finger, bearing rings set with flawless, blue diamonds, tapped the table before the stricken nobleman.

"—and sole monarch of the New World, with all its riches."

His words, sinking into the spirit of my lord of Stratford, left the man silent, sucking in his thin lips. D'Alaber, who had dealt with defeated noblemen before now, glanced at him as a physician might study a patient in convalescence and took Durforth's arm.

"Sir, I leave you to the meditations of prudence and I count upon your pledged aid. Send post to Orfordnesse if Edward nears the end, and so—fare you well."

But Stratford was voiceless, beholding in the eyes of his imagination the chains that were to be put upon him, no less binding for that they were of gold.

D'Alaber shrugged and whispered Durforth.

"Our islander hath served his turn, but for you señor we have a worthy commission."

"And a mort of danger."

"Ah, true. Have you put upon your ship the globe prepared by us."

"That I have, and a fine piece it is, bearing a *mappamundi* of all the known world."

"Use it. You know the course you are to sail, and what is to befall in the Ice Sea?"

Durforth nodded and smiled.

"'Twill be a merry company gathered at our setting forth. Nay, how will you keep this lad of Edward's from spying upon us? Had you forgotten him?"

Passing by the long mirror D'Alaber paused to adjust the clasp of his cloak.

"Memory is a good servant but a poor mistress. 'Tis my part to remember this unfortunate youth, yours to forget him. Study your part, Durforth, and *remember* that many an actor hath fallen foul of the pit by mistaking his cue."

CHAPTER III

A HAWK IS SLAIN

RALPH THORNE had been born, his comrades said, with a lucky hood on his head. Which was indeed only another way of saying that the boy managed to accomplish what he set out to do. His father, a merchant, was too wrapped up in the mystery of cosmography to thrive at barter and trade. The goods of the Thornes and then the ships and finally the manor in Suffolk had gone into the hands of those who had sharper wits.

Left to his own devices by a father who pored over globe and chart, for years young Thorne kept apart from other boys, who, after the fashion of children, made mock of him for his father's oddities, calling him the brat of the "Mad Cosmographer." He trained hawks, built bird houses in the oaks behind the Orfordnesse cottage, and ran with his dogs when the nights were clear.

Something of woodcraft he learned; he

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*The Spaniards and Portuguese were supreme on the high seas in this age and called shipmasters of all other nations rovers.

could keep still by a stream for half a day to watch the deer that came down to drink; he could bring down a charging boar with a spear; he could follow the trace of a stag and read, when the snow was on the ground, the stories told by the tracks.

Robert Thorne, after the way of parents, bade him follow the new pursuit of gentlemen, that of mariner adventurer. It irked the cosmographer that his son cared little for his maps and naught for his talk of ships and unknown seas, and bitter words passed between them.

But when a kinsman of his mother, wounded in a northern feud, abode at the cottage until his hurt mended and taught Ralph how to use a sword, the boy went to court with his relative and became an armiger, a squire-at-arms.

There he became devoted to sword-play, but remained what his early years had made him—a boy silent and grave beyond his years, with few friends and his full share of quarrels, because of a passionate temper, the heritage of the northern Thornes.

ICE SEA
NORTH CAPE
WARDHOUSE
ARCTIC CIRCLE
ATLANTIC OCEAN
NORWAY
CHRISTIANA
NORTH SEA
BALTIC SEA
ORFORDNESSE
LONDON

Having lacked parents and comrades and patrons, he liked best to be left to himself, but there was in him a burning loyalty to those who won his esteem.

AND now, on a misty morning, he rode from the stables of the Stratfords in high spirits, though his eyes and lips were somber. He had been given a charge by his king.

"To do what lies in me to aid Sir Hugh," he repeated under his breath, "to win to Cathay. For his majesty hath this venture much at heart."

That this was a large command did not trouble him; a youth of eighteen is nothing loath to tilt against windmills or seek, in his thoughts, the stronghold of legendary Prester John. And it often happens that good comes of high thoughts.

At the gate opening upon the northern highway he trotted into a group of men-at-arms who carried halberds though they did not seem to be on duty. They were lean and dark skinned; they wore finely wrought and polished armor, with thigh pieces and crested morions, inlaid with silver and gold. Thorne knew them for Spaniards.

One of them rose and took his rein as he would have passed.

"*Holá*, young sir. Thy name?"

Except for the light sword at his hip and the old-style leathern buckler strapped over his back, the squire was unarmed. On one wrist was a hawking gantlet; his favorite gerfalcon perched on it, and a velvet wallet bearing food for the bird was slung over the other shoulder.

"Stand back, knave," he made prompt answer in Spanish. "Loose my rein and curb your tongue to respect. Whose men are you?"

The one who had spoken did as he was bidden, though sullenly. Thorne wondered how Spaniards came to be posted as a guard.

"Signior, I kiss your hands," grinned the leader, "and would have of you your name. We are ordered to deliver a letter to a certain *caballero* who will pass through here."

"I am Ralph Thorne. Is your missive for me?"

The halberdier looked at his mates and then at the pavilions. "Ride on, signior," he responded. "Nay, go free, for all of us."

Thorne, without a backward glance, struck into the highway and left the last of the hedge taverns of Greenwich behind. The mist pressed about the fields on either hand, shrouding the oaks that lined the road, and to rid himself of the morning chill, he put his horse into a brisk trot. After a little he looked up from adjusting the hood tighter about the hawk, and listened.

Then he reined to one side and half turned his beast so that he could see the road behind him, winding at the same time his cloak over his left arm. Another horse was coming up swiftly through the mist, and he had no wish to be stripped and perhaps knocked on the head by thieves.

Seeing that the newcomer was a Spanish gentleman, mounted on a fine Arab, he was about to take up his reins again, when the stranger spurred his beast so close that Thorne's horse tossed its head and edged back, while the other shied.

"Now out upon thee for a mannerless lout!" D'Alaber exclaimed. "To block the road against thy betters!"

Thorne glanced at him swiftly, seeing under a plumed velvet hat a face small and white with intent eyes.

"Nay, Sir Stranger," he laughed, "the shoe is upon the other foot. For a man who can not manage such a mettled beast as that of yours is mannerless, indeed."

The other smiled indifferently.

"A pox on thy clownish merriment. Here's to requite thee for thy wit, my witless jester!"

So saying he drew the long rapier at his hip and, bending forward suddenly, ran the blade through the falcon that, blinded by its hood, perched on the young squire's wrist. The hawk screamed and fell the length of its chain, its wings threshing. Thorne stared down at his stricken pet, and the blood drained from his face.

"If you were Renard himself," he cried, "you should suffer for this."

Whipping out his rapier, he shortened his rein and kneed his horse toward the other, who awaited his coming with the same indifferent smile.

This smile stirred Thorne to recklessness; sheer anger made the tears come into his eyes and he attacked incautiously. A thrust of the long rapier through the cloak on his left arm brought him to his senses in time to parry the point that might otherwise have passed into his side.

D'ALABER was a man of moods. His retainers at the highway gate could have disposed of the troublesome armiger without risk to himself, but he wished it otherwise. He might have shot Thorne with one of the pistols at his belt, yet he chose to rouse the boy and then to spit him with a certain trick of the sword that he fancied.

The mist hid them from observers, and he could not dally because other riders might come up.

So he engaged Thorne's blade, parried a lunge at his throat and whirled his point. But when his arm went out, the armiger had caught his blade and turned it aside.

"A pretty conceit," muttered the squire, "clumsily executed."

He warded a second ripost, and reined his horse nearer. "You should—blindfold me, as well as the hawk."

Now D'Alber prided himself on his swordsmanship which was more than good and the gibe rankled. It was Thorne's trick to talk when steel was out or lead was flying and the Spaniard's pride was touched. He had the better horse and determined to end matters at once.

He saw his chance when Thorne's beast shied. The dying hawk had fluttered into the road and startled the horses, but D'Alaber's was under control at once. He plunged in his spurs and leaned forward. The two rapiers flashed and sang together, and the Arab swerved away. D'Alaber dropped his weapon and clutched the mane of his horse.

"*Por Dios!*" he cried faintly.

Thorne dismounted swiftly and came to his side, helping him to the ground, where the Spaniard lay moaning, one fist pressed under his heart. His breath came jerkily and his eyes stared up into Thorne's. By an effort of will he opened his lips.

"Tell Master Durforth," he whispered, "on the road a league toward Harwich—tell him D'Alaber is down. The Fox must know. Will you do this?"

Thorne was silent a moment.

"Aye, that I will."

The Spaniard continued to stare at him, and even after the dark eyes held no life in them they seemed to smolder with vindictive rage. Thorne drew the body to one side of the road and tied the Arab's reins to a branch. This done he mounted again and rode on with furrowed forehead.

"It likes me not," he mused. "The don was a fellow of Renard's and 'tis ill meddling with such. He set upon me with full intent, and there were none to see it. If I am charged with his taking off——"

He was riding on the king's business and did not mean to be delayed. But a pledge to a dying man must be kept, and he wanted a glance at this Master Durforth.

"My lord of Stratford did say that the Spaniards wished us evil, and here is one full of it already, and requited therefor, poor knave. He meant to ride, it would appear, with Durforth, and I must keep his rendezvous for him."

Some moments later he spurred out of the mist at a crossroads where several men had dismounted, evidently to wait for some one.

"Is Master Durforth in this company?" he called out, reining in.

"Aye, so."

A tall man in a fur-trimmed mantle looked up from his seat under a sign post.

"A Spaniard did put it upon me to tell you his sorry case. He lies by the hedge, a league toward Greenwich, and his horse is tethered there. It was his wish that a certain Renard should know of it. And so—keep you better company, my master."

Without waiting, Thorne spurred on and, when the mist closed around the forms of the astonished watchers, bent low in the saddle. A second later a pistol roared behind him and a ball whipped close to his hat. For a while he heard hoof beats coming after him, then they dwindled as the unseen riders perceived the folly of pursuit in the heavy fog.

Not until the sun broke through the mist and he could see the road ahead and behind did he allow his horse a breathing spell. Then he jogged on toward Orfordnesse, sorely puzzled.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAD COSMOGRAPHER

IT IS ever the way of crowds to mock what they can not understand. And the good folk of Orfordnesse were in no wise different from other crowds; children thumbed their noses at old Master Thorne; young men sharpened their tongues with witticisms at his expense at the White Hart tavern; the elders shook their heads, saying that no good could come of such doings as his, and there was talk of putting him in the pillory. The very dogs of the haven barked at his threadbare heels when he limped to the ale house.

So that now old Master Thorne rarely showed himself in the village, subsisting no one knew just how, but laboring of nights, as the gleam of a candle in the casement showed. Honest men, it was well known, did not work in the hours of darkness.

So they called him the Mad Cosmographer.

He had gathered in the cottage the fruits of years of wandering, of talks with outland shipmen, of studying mariners' journals and the manuscripts of Oxford. He had brought charts from Paris, and once he had been forced to flee from Spain when he managed to copy fairly the world-map of Ptolemy the Astrologer.

For in Venice and Genoa and Seville the secrets of navigation were jealously guarded; the charts of *hidalgos* errant were the property of the state, and knowledge of the deviation of the compass, and the use of the cross-staff for observation of the sun were kept from other nations.

But Master Thorne labored of nights comparing charts and drawing the coasts of the Western Ocean and the vague Pacific that was supposed to be no more than a wide strait lying between New Spain and Cathay.

"For, my masters," he said in the White Hart tavern, "how may our shipmen and navigants set forth an they have not true charts of the outer seas? I have seen the wealth of the new worlds swell the coffers of the dons, and great fleets of *caravellas* come in from the gold coasts and spiceries. What share have we in this trade?

"The notable navigant, Messer John Cabot, did draw a true and fair *mappamundi;* where is it to be seen now? Where is the good Cabot? Both have met foul play." *

To this the folk of the village made response with many a wink and covert nudge.

"Take care, Master Thorne. Thou be'st grown so great in opinion, the *hidalgos* may prick 'ee. Thou may'st drink a bitter browst of thine own brewing."

Master Thorne always faced his tormentors defiantly, stick in hand, his high quavering voice cutting through all other talk as a boatswain's whistle pierces the rattle of gear.

"Our fortune lies beyond the known seas and we men of England have no heart to seek it."

"What boots it," they made answer, "if cargoes of silk and oil and balm come to us from Cathay, out of the Levant in Venetian bottoms? We have enough of our own, God be praised."

They fared well enough to their thinking with the coast fisheries and the occasional run into Antwerp or Venice. Only the Hollanders and the Spaniards built the tall vessels that could venture beyond the edge of the known world. And they were soon weary of Thorne's warnings and urgings that some one must set out on the longer voyages.

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*John Cabot's maps perished with him. There was a dearth of charts in England at this time, except for the Sebastian Cabot "Mappe Munde" of 1544.

"We hold no traffic wi' the seas of darkness, nor the pagan folk," they said.

"Aye," one added, "'tis true beyond peradventure that mariners who sail over the edge of the known seas enter into the realm and dominion of the Evil One."

"Art mad, Gaffer Thorne," gibed a tippler. "Art plaguish wi' thy tongue as thy wildling boy Ralph wi' his sword—he that swashes bucklers and ruffles it among the squires of dames in London town."

"A foul lie," cried the old man, drawing his weather stained cloak about him and grasping his stick as if it were the hilt of a sword.

It irked his pride that Ralph had never sought for service on the king's ships, and the wits of Orfordnesse knew it.

"Ralph at least is oversea."

"Nay, Gaffer Thorne, he's *opzee*—seas over. He's drunk as a lord."

"I warrant—" another gibe cut through the shout of laughter that went up at this sally—"the Mad Cosmographer hath come to learn if his lad be master of one of the three tall ships that be standing in past the sand spits."

* * *

IN THIS moment, when Sir Hugh Willoughby's three ships had been sighted and many of the folk of Orfordnesse had gathered at the White Hart, Ralph Thorne dismounted from a sweat-darkened horse in the courtyard and entered the taproom, pausing for a moment on the threshold when he heard the words of the last speakers.

He was recognized, although not at once, because he had been a gawky boy in tatters when he left the village some years before. Now his wide gray eyes swept the room tranquilly. The Orfordnesse folk stared at his Spanish boots of good leather, his embroidered baldric and slender rapier, shaped after the new fashion.

They saw a man who could keep his temper at need and his own counsel at will, who walked with a purpose and evidently rode hither with one, since his horse was winded and bore no saddle bags.

"My masters," he said, "I greet you well. My service, sir, to you."

He bowed to his father who had been peering at him uncertainly.

"Fulke," he added to the innkeeper who came up rubbing his hands, aglow with curiosity, "a stable knave to tend my horse and do you draw me a mug of the *opzee** beer that, by reason of being strong and heady, sits but ill upon a loose tongue."

And he smiled gravely on the assembled company.

"Why lad—Ralph!"

The wrinkled eyes of the old merchant-adventurer gleamed joyfully; then he drew into himself with a kind of cautious dignity. Making room beside him on the bench, he stole a glance ever and anon at his son's dusty hip boots and excellent weapons.

"Ha, Spanish leather! And one of those Roman toys. Give me a good, broad tuck now, and I would break you that steel spit you call a sword."

"Fulke," commanded Thorne when that worthy came up with the beer, "do you fetch this company somewhat to drink. Meseems they are but dull and silent."

So indeed the men of Orfordnesse had fallen, and all their eyes were for the young squire and their ears for his words.

"Ah," quoth the landlord glumly, "and who's to pay the reckoning?"

From the purse Stratford had given him Thorne pulled a gold piece and spun it on the table top.

"So you may know it sound and full weight," he assured Fulke.

"Ralph," whispered the cosmographer, "you've been serving the king's majesty. Perhaps you've been on a tall ship of war, eh?"

"Not I."

"Then it may have happened, you've surely an appointment as ship's captain."

Thorne shook his head.

"Not even for a row-galley?"

"Faith, nor a cockboat." He glanced down at his father quizzically. "Nay, you can not make me out a personage; no more than an armiger."

"An arms-bearer. An esquire-at-arms. *Pfaugh,* it hath an outlandish ring. And I——"

He broke off as he was about to tell Ralph of the persecution he had endured.

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*This upsea or "opzee" Dutch beer seems to have originated the phrase "seas-over" or "half seas over."

Grimly he closed his lips, reflecting that it was ever the way of the Thornes to choose their own path in the world, to keep their own counsel and ask favors of no one.

"I did think that you were a follower of the worshipful Master Cornelius Durforth who is a ship's captain upon Sir Hugh Willoughby's fleet. Aye, he was pleased to make mention of your name, asking if you had come to Orfordnesse."

"Where abides Durforth?"

"In the manor house, with my lord Renard who is new come from London."

Thorne emptied his mug and looked into it thoughtfully. Durforth must have changed horses several times during the three days ride from London to reach Orfordnesse ahead of him. He had not known until then that D'Alaber's companion was one of Sir Hugh's gentlemen, and captain of a ship.

"Where did you speak Durforth?" he asked.

"At the cottage." The old cosmographer lifted his head and nodded proudly. "Aye, he had heard of my poor work. Master Durforth is a skilled navigant. He spared some praise for my charts of the northern seas, and did ask my aid in a vexatious problem."

"In what?"

Master Thorne blinked shrewdly and lifted a warning finger.

"Nay, Ralph you were loutish indeed to think the secrets of cosmography are to be blabbed in a pothouse."

Ralph had some knowledge of his father's stubbornness.

"Then must I talk with you this night."

"Nay, the reverend Master Cabot hath sent word that he will visit me, upon the evening Sir Hugh makes his landfall, or perhaps it was the next morning. My memory—ah!"

A boy had run in crying that the ships had come to anchor and boats were putting off. Straightway the throng in the tavern dwindled as the Orfordnesse folk went out to stare at the vessels and their crews.

"Enough!" cried Master Thorne, hobbling to his feet and seizing his stick. "We have tarried too long. Come, Ralph, we must greet these worshipful gentlemen; aye, and talk with them concerning the course they will sail and the charts. Now I wonder what charts they would have? What, will you not come?"

He stamped off, forgetting everything else in his eagerness, leaving Ralph smiling at his father's familiar eccentricity.

But, once he had the tap room to himself, the smile vanished and he stared into space with a furrowed brow.

Durforth was in Orfordnesse. Surely the man had been bound hither when he left London with D'Alaber. And the Fox himself was lying at the manor house nearby. Durforth had spoken with Renard.

"Fulke," he called to the landlord, who was leaving the room, "how many followers hath lord Renard in his train?"

"A round score of lusty fellows, who have turned out the stables to make place for their nags," responded the innkeeper sullenly.

Stables! Thorne recalled the guard posted at Stratford's gate, and the attack upon himself that followed. He had spoken to no one of his mission, yet Durforth had known that he was riding to Orfordnesse. Stratford must have told the ship's captain, or possibly D'Alaber. But why?

"Fulke," he called the landlord back again, "here is a fair purse of gold crowns. I fear me 'tis attained with Spanish treachery and so will have none of it. Will you take it?"

He tossed the embroidered sack on the sand that lay underfoot and the tavern keeper caught it up, hefting it in his fist. Then, with a glance around to see that no one was looking he edged over to the armiger and bent down his hairy face.

"Hark 'ee, Maister Ralph, what's the lay? What's i' the wind? I can do a pretty trick for him as is free-handed. Is it a matter of trepanning, or a wench——"

"'Od's life, Fulke, you have a belly that refuses naught. I'm over fanciful as to such tools. Now get you gone and let me think."

SCRATCHING his head and with more than one backward glance, the innkeeper obeyed, and presently bethought him that Ralph was the son of the Mad Cosmographer and so might reasonably be expected to share his sire's lunacy. And after the events of that night Fulke was certain of it, though he never showed the purse to prove his point.

Meanwhile, head clasped between his clenched fists, the armiger was considering how he was going to warn Sir Hugh—whom he had never seen—of a danger that confronted the knight and his ships.

Renard would never have come to Orfordnesse unless high stakes were on the table. Evidently a blow was to be struck at Sir Hugh. But how? The Spaniard's retainers were too few to risk a fight; moreover even the Fox would not dare do that as yet.

Thorne was morally certain that Durforth was an agent of the Spaniard's party. In that brief moment in the mist he had read guilt in the other's startled face. Certainly Durforth had not scrupled to use a pistol on him. Moreover this same ship's captain had by ill chance—he cursed his father's dotage and pride—seen the maps in the Thorne cottage. Renard would be interested in those.

To go to Sir Hugh with the tale? What proof had he to offer? It would be his word against Durforth's, and the matter of D'Alaber's death might be charged against him. That would not serve.

After a while he took up his sword. Here was no matter for words. Two attempts had been made on his life, and he intended to make the third move. He would go among the voyagers, listen to what was said and, if he still suspected Durforth, would pick a quarrel with the man and leave the issue to the swords.

CHAPTER V

CATHAY

THE sun was low when Master Cabot landed with his companions. The bent figure clad in dark velvets was unmistakable; the forked white beard had not its like in England. With Sir Hugh, a tall man, florid of face, Cabot drove off to the manor house, leaving Richard Chancellor, master of the *Edward*, and Durforth of the smallest vessel, the *Confidentia*, to sup at the tavern.

This was by reason that three of the mariners on the ships had fallen ill and must be put ashore.

Chancellor, a young gentleman, simply clad in gray broadcloth, without a hat on his tawny curls, made plea to the Orfordnesse loiterers to embark in the stead of the sick shipment; but no one volunteered.

Thorne waited until Chancellor, Durforth and his father had taken their seats at the long table in the public room, then seated himself at the far end where they could not see him for the Orfordnesse merchants that crowded to places between. And, while he did full justice to Fulke's mutton and pastry, he listened to the talk, which was all of the voyage.

" 'Tis clear," observed old Master Thorne, "that a northwest passage to Cathay does not exist—at least where we hoped to find it. The Spaniard, Balboa, has sighted the ocean that lies beyond America. Yet no passage by water hath opened out."

"So," demanded a merchant, "Sir Hugh ventures to seek it in the northeast?"

"Master Cabot," put in Durforth with a slight smile, "doth believe that the open sea extends north of the Easterling* coast to Cathay."

The men of Orfordnesse stared at him in amazement. At rare intervals they had seen the small, single-masted vessels of the Easterlings driven on the coast by a tempest, or come to trade cod and whale oil. These dwarfs—for the men from the edge of the known world were no taller than an Englishman's armpit—were dressed always in fish skins and pelts of beasts.

It was said of them that they possessed the power of sorcery, of putting a blight on cattle, of carrying off maidens unresisting, by the lure of their slant eyes. They could foretell the future, and in their own country they rode from place to place on the back of wild deer, called reindeer.

Between this land of the Easterlings and the pole lay the stretch of water called the Ice Sea. But to sail up, beyond the edge of the known world, into this Ice Sea to seek Cathay!

A red-bearded merchant, who had once been blown up to the Shetlands, smiled knowingly.

"Nay, my lords, you embark upon a fantasy! For a hundred and fifty leagues the coast of Norway is a desert land. And know that off this coast there lies a mighty indraught or whirlpool of waters."

"Malestrand," assented another.

"So men call it. The currents of all the seas do tend to Malestrand, and there are engulfed with a fearful roaring and rack, whirling down to the depths."

" 'Tis said," put in the tavern keeper who had lent his ear to the talk, "that whales, feeling themselves drawn toward this whirlpool do cry out most piteously. Aye, as ever was!"

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*Easterlings—Lapps, Finns and Tatars.

"And ships," nodded the red beard, "be lost that touch on Malestrand, forby they're spewed out again as bare timbers and planks. From this central in-draft o' the seas the tides have their being."

To these warnings Master Thorne harkened with small patience, but Durforth, ever smiling and crumbling bread into his empty glass, seemed to be weighing the effect of the tales on his companions.

"So," he observed at last, "I take it the merchants of Orfordnesse have no will to risk goods on this venture?"

One by one they shook their heads, some swearing with a great oath that here was no mere risk but the certainty of loss. He of the red beard, their spokesman, explained matters.

"For that," he cried triumphantly, "the Easterlings are able to summon tempests out of the heavens and floes of ice taller than ships to close the channels. Aye, and a more marvelous thing, to arrest the sun in its natural course, so that it hung ever above the rim of the world and there was no night."

Now for the first time Richard Chancellor spoke quietly.

"The sun will bide where it will, my masters. Our governor, Messer Cabot, doth relate that off the Labrador of America the days are of twenty hours and the night is brighter than in this part of the earth. Storms and ice we may meet and will deal with them, God willing."

At this the aged Master Thorne blazed out eagerly:

"Well spoken! Sir, in my time I have made shift to draw a true card of the world and, to my thinking, open water extends from Norway to the mighty empire of Cathay."

Laughter and muttered pleasantries greeted the Mad Cosmographer, but Chancellor glanced at him with interest, and made courteous answer, slowly as was his habit.

"By experience, Master Thorne, we may come at the truth. By my reckoning, if a northeast passage exists, 'twill shorten the voyage to Cathay by two thousand leagues. So——"

He laid the dagger, with which he had been cutting slices off the leg of mutton, at the top of his plate and touched the pommel.

"Here, or below here lies Cathay, and the island of Zipangu where all silk comes from." He ran his finger from the point to the end of the hilt. "Thus may we voyage from England to Cathay by the northeast passage—if one is to be found."

Then, moving his finger from the point of the dagger, around the plate, he added:

"In this way do the ships of the emperor and the Portingals go to their spicery at the far Indies. As you see, the distance is more than twice as great."

MASTER THORNE cried approval and lifted his glass, calling upon all present to drink the health of the sea farers, the navigants. The merchants of Orfordnesse responded with an ill grace, and Chancellor, who was a blunt man, eyed them in angry curiosity.

"Your greatest peril," Thorne remarked, "lies in the cold. Passing the seventh clime, the cold is so great few can suffer it."

"We will do what men may," said Chancellor who was the pilot-major.

"By your leave," put in Durforth, rousing up suddenly, "I hold it folly to go on."

"And why?"

Chancellor frowned as if an old point of debate had arisen.

"Master Thorne hath the right of it; the lands at the pole are uninhabitable."

"Nay," the cosmographer corrected him, "I said you must guard against the cold. Our fathers held that the lands under the Equinoctial[*] Line were full of an unendurable heat, yet hath experience proven them both fair and pleasant. There is no land uninhabitable, no sea innavigable!"

Durforth emptied the crumbs from his glass with a gesture of irritation.

"Words! As advisor of the council, I say, Chancellor, that we must bide another season. 'Tis now hard upon midsummer, so greatly have we been delayed. 'Twill be the season of autumnal storms when we pass north of Norway. If you and Sir Hugh—who knoweth little of the seas—will not wait another year, at least send to the court and learn the wishes of his majesty."

Now, hearing this, Ralph Thorne pushed aside his plate and stood up, waiting until he caught Durforth's eye. The ship's captain started slightly and his jaw set, so that his pointed black beard seemed to jut forward.

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[*] The Equator.

"It is known to me," observed the armiger when silence fell, "that his majesty doth pray for the success of this venture. And any man who puts an impediment in the way of this voyage is a traitor, no less. Who saith otherwise, lies."

"I will venture where any man dare set foot," cried Cornelius Durforth and beat upon the table with his knotted fist.

No one, seeing the muscles set in his sun tanned face, doubted that he was capable of making good his words.

"Do not spill the wine," put in Ralph Thorne, his hand on his glass. "And do not bring in question again the wishes of the king, which you should know as well as I."

Durforth frowned at the youth and went on without heeding him.

"Ill luck dogs us this season. The ships had the wind over the hawse standing down the Thames, and three of our mariners be taken sick. These be portents. Turn back, say I."

Again he smote the table until the jugs and glasses leaped and clattered.

"I pray you," said the armiger softly, "do not spill the wine."

"Still your springald's tongue when elders speak!" cried his father angrily.

"Will you bide for word from the king?" Durforth demanded of the pilot-major.

"Sir Hugh will not, nor will I hang back. If it is not God's will we win to Cathay this season, we may yet find new lands and Christian princes to offer us haven."

The ship's master, fingering the gold chain at his throat, shrugged, and the silence that fell upon them was broken by Ralph Thorne.

"Do not spill the wine again, sir."

Anger glowed in Durforth's dark eyes.

"Your loutish words, sir, hint at the manner of your birth. Was it in a ditch, or perhaps a gutter that you first looked upon the world?"

The youth from the court raised his glass in his fingers and tossed its contents into the face of the ship master who sat across the table from him.

"Nay, my lord, this should be evidence that I have not learned manners from the Fox."

Durforth gained his feet, and, wiping the liquid from his cheeks, found no words to reply. His hand groped for his sword hilt and he whipped the blade clear, kicking back the chair upon which he had sat. The armiger drew his rapier and placed it, point to pommel, against the quivering weapon of the older man.

"Art' content, Master? Our swords be of a length."

"By the eyes of ——, would you stand against me, Thorne?"

"Aye, so, unless," the youth made response gravely, "you are pleased to confess to this company the manner in which you learned my name."

Fleetingly Durforth glanced from the cosmographer to his son, and Master Thorne answered the unspoken question.

"Lad," his old voice quavered with anxiety, "what is this?"

Then, beholding the settled purpose, stern in the youth's face, he flew into a rage at the unforseen quarrel.

"Better you had died in the gutter, than thus to affront honorable gentlemen. Nay, you are no son of mine."

" 'Tis the cosmographer's whelp!" cried an Orfordnesse man. "Have him to the dogs!"

But Durforth swore a great oath and announced that however the villain had been whelped, he would put him into the earth before an hour had passed, and summoned Chancellor to act as his second.

" 'Tis clear, my lord," cried the armiger, "that you have profited from the teaching of Master Fox. Nay, I have no second, so must perform the office myself—not for the first time. Beside the inn is a fair meadow, and the evening light is good."

NOW at the second mention of the Fox, Chancellor looked thoughtfully at the youth, as if he would ask a question. But, meeting with no sign of understanding, he turned away, palpably puzzled. The surgeon from the fleet was at the tavern and accompanied them to the clear stretch of grass that Ralph Thorne pointed out.

The red bearded merchant was selected to give the word that would set the two men against each other. Ralph stripped himself to his shirt and stood for a moment to let the breeze cool his forehead.

Chancellor and the surgeon were arguing with Durforth in lowered voices, seeking to have the quarrel patched up before harm was done, pointing out that Thorne was scarce a man grown, but Durforth would have none of them.

And Thorne, listening to the break and wash of the swell on the beach where he had played many a time not so long since, now had eyes only for the stalwart figure that loomed in its white shirt over against the trees.

"Begin, gentlemen," quoth the red beard.

Durforth stepped toward his antagonist, his point advanced, the dagger in his left hand gripped at his hip. The armiger took time to salute him, smiling, and this seemed to anger the ship master who lunged and sprang in, his dagger flashing.

Engaging and parrying the sword, Thorne stepped aside from the dagger thrust, half turning as he did so. For a moment the two blades slithered together as the swordsmen felt each other out. Durforth was in no mood for this and leaped in, grunting, for his antagonist had turned his sword aside and avoided the dagger thrust again.

This time the armiger stepped clear, lowering his point. "Guard yourself better, Durforth, or I will spoil you."

He had not used his poniard yet, but as Durforth thrust powerfully, he locked sword hilts, and stabbed at the man's heart. Durforth was quick to see the dagger flash, and his own poniard went at Thorne's throat.

There was no parrying and no avoiding the double cuts. But Durforth swayed to the right as he struck, so that the armiger's dagger missed his heart, ripping through his side instead. And Durforth's poniard, instead of entering the youth's throat, grated against the collarbone and caught in the shoulder muscles.

They drew their daggers clear, and Thorne, feeling his left arm grow numb, let his own fall to the grass.

"A cool head, I vow," muttered the surgeon, calling Chancellor's attention to this. "He may not strike a good blow with his left, and so presses the tall fellow with his sword. Ha!"

Durforth, feeling the blood drain from his wound had advanced to the attack again, his dark eyes venomous. But Thorne's rapier coiled over his blade and forced him to give ground. Back and back he went, to the side of the field where they had entered. All his skill was bent to the task of guarding his life, for he was given no further chance to use the poniard.

"A moment ago," quoth the surgeon critically, "the lad would have exchanged his throat for a blow, but now—a rare sword, he. Give you odds, sir, he slays the black beard."

It fell out otherwise. Figures appeared in the dusk, running from the tavern, voices cried out and the ringing of steel ceased. Two gentlemen who came upon the scene had struck up the weapons of the antagonists, and between them stood a form there was no mistaking.

"In the king's name, have done!"

Master Cabot's thin voice was rife with anxiety. He breathed hard, having come in haste when he heard at the inn of the duel that was to be fought. With him were others in a green livery, and one especially, who, attired in all the splendor of costly sables and seal skin with a massy chain of gold around his throat, kept in the center of the newcomers as by right and stared about him thoughtfully, pinching his lip between thumb and forefinger.

Durforth dashed the sweat from his eyes and flung down his weapons, calling upon the surgeon to bind his hurt, but Thorne confronted Cabot sword in hand, quivering with anger.

"Sir, by what right do you come between us?"

The old navigator leaned on his stick composedly.

"Tush, lad, is the voyage to Cathay not a greater thing than thy wildfire temper? I can not have Master Durforth spoiled for the venture. nay he knoweth, above all others, the proper course to round Norway. Amend thy quarreling and cry quits."

"Never!" broke in Thorne.

Cabot fingered his long beard, frowning.

"Thy father came to me at the manor house, and did ask that the duel be stopped, for like the loyal Englishman he is, he hath the success of the venture at heart."

"Nay, your Durforth hath earned his death."

"How?"

Thorne opened his lips to reply, but beholding the new arrival who stood apart among the men in livery, he kept silence while the company in the meadow scanned him curiously.

"I may not say, at this moment."

Hearing this, Durforth, who had been bending over the bandage on his side, smiled and sheathed the sword that the surgeon handed him.

"You are discreet—a trifle late, my young hotspur."

"Here is a riddle," murmured Sebastian Cabot. "A youth who proclaims a just quarrel and a man grown who admits of none. Stay! Knowest thou this springald, Master Durforth?"

"Not I. His face is strange to me."

"Perhaps, gentlemen," observed a level voice, "I can rede ye this riddle."

"Aye, we may well profit by thy wisdom, Renard," assented Cabot. "And so shall I be twice thy debtor, since thou hast been at the pains to come from London hither with a coach for my conveyance from the coast."

CHAPTER VI

MASTER CABOT SPEAKS

THE man addressed as Renard answered the navigator's courtesy with a bow. He had the assurance of one who makes himself at home in all company, yet the manner of one born in a high station. Carrying his head a little aslant, what with his beaked nose and his fur necklet he did somewhat resemble the fox that his name signified.

"This youth, my masters," he went on, "is known to me and others as a follower of a certain person of the court. It is in my mind that his patron desired the death of your ship captain, and so despatched this Thorne upon his mission of mortality. 'Tis said others have fallen by his blade in the *duello*."

His words were tinged with a foreign accent, and he seemed to find in them food for a jest. At any rate he smiled, his thin face saturnine in the dusk.

"Who sent you?" demanded Chancellor the outspoken.

"The king," responded Thorne as bluntly, "by my lord of Stratford."

"Ah," observed Master Renard, "a moment ago you did not deny that Durforth had not the honor of your acquaintance."

The armiger looked at him silently, bending the slender steel between his fingers, paying no attention to the gash in his shoulder.

"And as you do not deny it now," the newcomer pointed out, " 'tis passing strange that you should name Durforth a traitor. Nay, is a man a traitor because he spills wine in a hedge tavern? Or—and you are a *soldado*, a bearer of arms—do you hold him doomed because he resents a slight?"

Still Thorne was silent, alert as if he faced a new antagonist whose speech was no less deadly than the tall man's steel.

"Lacking other evidence," Renard concluded, "it must appear that you picked a quarrel with Master Durforth, who is embarking upon the king's business. Did any one lay such command upon you?"

Thorne perceived at once the shrewdness in this questioning. 'Renard must have heard from Durforth of the death of D'Alaber. Nothing was more certain than that the Spaniard desired vengeance for the death of his follower. And Renard had several gentlemen in attendance, with a score of men-at-arms within call.

To make known that Edward was dying and the Papists all but in power might give excuse for a general drawing of weapons in which Chancellor and Sir Hugh who had no men at their backs would be slain.

" 'Tis a hanging matter you have embarked upon," resumed Renard lightly, "but——"

"No 'buts' my lord!" The armiger laughed. "Either I am a murderer, dealing death for so much silver in hand, or I am a gentleman affronted in his cups. If the second, my quarrel is my own affair and you are cursedly inquisitive; if the first, why summon up the bailifs to hale me into jail, there to await the king's justice."

"The lad stands upon his rights," assented Chancellor gruffly. "Durforth miscalled him in the tavern. Let him go."

Cabot had been questioning the surgeon, and now turned, palpably relieved.

"Aye no harm has been done to either. The hurts are slight. Come, my masters, a glass of wine. The ships sail before dawn with the tide."

"I pray you," put in Renard,"come up with me to the manor house where we shall fare better."

He spoke briefly to two of his men, and Thorne, who watched them in the deeping dusk saw them move off toward the tavern and the waiting coach. With a stifled exclamation he strode forward, coming between Chancellor and the old navigator. "Master Cabot, do you know with whom you drink?"

"Surely," smiled the navigator, "with the Lord Renard, preceptor of the Princess Mary Tudor."

"And a Spaniard who is no mean cosmographer—who hath no love for us of England."

Sebastian Cabot was old, and loved quiet better than angry words; moreover he was governor of the Mystery and Company of Merchants-Adventurers of London, newly formed. He had labored greatly to outfit and man the three ships, and the last thing he desired was a quarrel with the powerful envoys from Spain at the court.

He rested his hand on the arm that Chancellor held out, and made answer not so much to Thorne as to the others who listened in astonishment to the charge of the young armiger.

"Nay, we would have lacked many things in this venture, had not my Lord Renard given us aid, in weighty advice. He hath been diligent in our council for which we are beholden to him."

BY NOW they had come to the street where Renard's lackeys with lighted torches awaited them, with the merchants of Orfordnesse and those who had come from the ships. These bowed respectfully to the old navigator, who, leaning upon the arm of the pilot, looked around in benign satisfaction.

"Gentlemen, it is seemly that we should bid farewell to these navigants in such a pleasant hour."

The vague unrest that had clouded his lined features at Thorne's accusation disappeared; his eyes brightened and his voice rang out with something of the assurance of other days when he had stood on his own poop.

"Let no factions arise in your company, my masters; if you differ in opinion, submit the question to the council of officers of the captain-general, Sir Hugh. Remember, when you reach the new lands, to take precautions against attack.

"The natives you will see, perchance, have no knowledge of Christians or their ships. If you take one of the savages on your ships, entreat him in friendly wise, give him food and apparel and set him safely ashore.

"When you go ashore, leave mariners to guard the pinnace and venture not to any city of the pagans save in numbers sufficient for your protection and with swords and firelocks in hand. If a storm arises, agree upon a meeting place where your ships may join together if you are parted."

Then, turning to the people of Orfordnesse he lifted his hand.

"And you, sirs, who keep to your own coast, bethink ye that these navigants go of their own will into the perils of the sea, and the uncertainties of pagan lands. We hazard a little money upon Fortune; they risk their lives. For those who, by God's will, are not to return to this coast, whose sepulcher shall be the sea or pagan earth, let us offer our prayers."

He bent his head and the folk of Orfordnesse, amazed at his gentle words, followed his example in silence, harkening to the spluttering of the torches, the mild rustle of the wind in the foliage and the sighing and muttering of the distant breakers. Perhaps it was the first time they had ever prayed for men who were yet living.

THORNE waited until the last of the gentry had gone off in the coaches of the manor house, attended by linkmen. Then he allowed the inn keeper, who had a liking for gossip, to wash out the cut in his shoulder and wrap wet cloths around it. Which being done, he called for his horse.

"Alack, Master Ralph, thou'lt not ride, wi' thy shoulder hacked and bloodied."

Master Ralph, pacing the yard betwixt pump and threshold, offering no response, the fellow tried another tack.

"The gentry be mortal angered at ye, angered as ever was! Thou'lt not be for London town, where the worshipful lords would set thy body on a gibbet. Or it may be a wrack, or e'en fire and the stake."

Abruptly—so quickly that the worthy keeper of the White Hart quivered in the ample region of his stomach—the armiger stopped his walk, close beside him.

"Where is the nag?"

The other muttered something about the horse being foundered and his men all beside themselves, what with the king's gentlemen and the Spanish lord.

Thorne took up the lanthorn which Fulke had fetched with him.

"Nay, I'll wait upon myself." And, glancing back a moment later, he was amused to see his stout host legging it around the tavern.

Reflecting that he had gained, over night, a reputation for violence, he sought the stables and halted to peer within the carriage house at the line of stalls in the rear. The horses were stamping and restless but he could not see any stable knaves.

Thoughtfully he set the lanthorn down

between his feet. The delay in bringing his horse out, the uneasiness of the beasts in the stalls, the alarm of the tavern keeper, all this bred in Thorne an undefinable suspicion.

He was at some pains to make certain by listening and watching the shadows in the stable that no retainers of the Spaniard were awaiting him here.

He was alone in the stable, but not at ease in his mind. Instinct urged him to turn and run through the door, or at least to look around. Instead, the armiger unbuckled the clasp that held his cloak at the throat. Still grasping the loosened ends he stepped forward, over the lanthorn, and let the long riding cloak fall. So it covered the light, and the stable was in darkness that same second.

Thorne stepped to one side, his soft leather boots making no sound on the trodden earth, and laughed aloud. From one of the windows behind the carriages a pistol had blazed and roared, filling the place with smoke and setting the horses frantic.

"A popper is no weapon for the dark, my masters," he cried. "Come in, with your cutters. The door is open."

As he spoke he shifted position again, drawing his rapier and considering how to get himself out of this trap with a whole skin. With his injured arm extended to the full in front of him, and his sword drawn back ready for a thrust, he moved toward the entrance, through utter blackness. At once his groping fingers touched something that moved and started at his touch.

His rapier went out, and was turned aside by an iron corselet. In the same second a pistol went off under his chin, the ball thudding into wood behind him. The explosion sent a myriad sparks dancing across his sight, and the powder stung his cheek. Swinging his blade over his shoulder he struck with the pommel, feeling it smash against a man's head.

A heavy morion clattered on the ground and his assailant staggered back. Coughing and gasping from the powder fumes, Thorne leaped through the door and ran across the inn yard. A cart shaft tripped him, and he stifled a groan as his injured shoulder struck a heap of manure.

Before he could get to his knees he heard men run past him. Others, who had found the lanthorn, were searching the stable. He lay where he was until the first of his pursuers had gained the highroad. Then he crawled around the wagon and between evil-smelling ordure to the hedge that he knew formed the fence around the field wherein he had fought Durforth an hour ago.

Following this he reached a thicket and paused to brush himself off and listen. Horses were being taken from the stable and saddled, and riders were pounding away on the road. Men were shouting at the tavern—questions to which muffled answers were flung back.

Some one cried out that thieves were at the horses, and a lieutenant of my lord Renard's harquebusiers swore in two languages that the thieves had got away.

"You are clever, you who serve the Fox," Thorne mused. "But your master will give no thanks for this night's bungling after he was at pains to draw away the other gentlemen and leave you a clear field."

Old acquaintance with the White Hart and the village served him well now, for, avoiding the highroad, he walked down a path that led to a spring and from thence to a homestead.

Crossing the fields, he headed up Orfordnesse Hill, and so came presently to the cottage of his father.

LIFTING the latch, he stepped into the utter darkness of a room. As he was swinging shut the door, a rush-bottomed chair creaked and a voice addressed him.

"So, sirrah, your lust for blood is still insatiate? Have you come to add your father to the number of unfortunates that have fallen to your sword? Or do I now behold you in the rôle of a simple thief? Nay, I know your step."

The armiger closed the door gently and felt his way around the table to an empty chair. Master Thorne, he judged, sat alone within arm's reach. Since the fire on the hearth was cold and the candles all unlighted he knew that the old cosmographer was grieving over the events of the last few hours.

The familiar smell of the room, of leather and musty parchments, stirred in him the memory of other evenings when he had sat at ease by a roaring fire while Master Thorne talked of ships and strange lands and ever of the sea.

"Sir," he said. "I must be gone within the hour with certain garments of mine. Do you propose to give me away to Renard's retainers?"

"I hand over no man in my house. But how will you win free? The soldiery is upon the road and the village is being searched. I met a company of riders who did maintain that you had set upon and foully slain two of their number in a tavern brawl."

Warning his father not to make a light Thorne felt his way up the narrow stair to his room under the roof, the room that Master Thorne had promised should be kept for him against the time of his return.

And everything was as he had left it. Opening a clothes chest, he drew out a soiled woolen doublet, and hose and light buskins that had served for hunting in other days. Going down with his possessions, he stumbled and uttered an exclamation of pain when his shoulder struck against the stair post.

"Art hurt, lad?"

"Gashed a trifle. 'Twill not keep me from the business of ridding the earth of him who did it, the rogue Durforth."

"Wert ever a wildling, Ralph. I—I had told my people in Orfordnesse that they would see you upon the deck of a king's ship. But now——"

The anxiety that had been in his voice fell cold, and he kept silence while the youth changed to the old garments. It caused Ralph no little ado and pain to ease the stiffened doublet over his shoulder and he favored his hurt by keeping on the good linen shirt that he had worn to Orfordnesse—a circumstance that he had reason to regret afterward.

Meanwhile Master Thorne had been cogitating, and, while his son wrapped up the blood-stained riding attire into a bundle, delivered himself of his thoughts:

"You may not return to the village; the folk in the manor house would turn you off, if they did not clap you into jail; the highway is closed by my lord Renard's men. So, are you for the woods, where the outlaws and half-plucked gallows birds lurk? Have you a horse?"

"Where I am going no horse may serve."

The armiger felt his way out of the cottage and returned presently without his bundle, explaining briefly that he had hidden it in a hay rick.

"So that the men of the Fox will not come upon it when they search this place, as they will. My sword—" he hesitated, reluctantly—" nay, do you keep it, an you will——"

"But——"

"The blade is cleaned. Hang it in scabbard on the wall and put dust upon it. 'Twill bring no shame upon the house," he added.

"——'s light, fool! Wilt have need of sword; aye and firelocks i' the forest?"

"The Fox would put such a price on my head that your runagate rogues of the woods 'd have me out of there in a trice. Nay, all roads are closed but one. I'm for the ships."

Master Thorne leaned forward, striving to catch sight of his son's face in the gloom.

"Not Sir Hugh's ships?"

"Aye, Sir Hugh's ships. When do they sail?"

"With the morning tide, lad. The officers go out to their vessels at midnight. But, Ralph, how will you join their company? They need no more gentlemen adventurers and, faith, Master Cabot would not have such a roisterer as you."

"Nor would Durforth, that is certain. But I have a plan; nay, it must keep, for time presses. Renard's men may pay us a visit within the hour. So, harken to what hath befallen me, for you must bear these tidings to London."

Slowly, that the old man might understand everything, and in few words that he might remember, Thorne related all that had taken place at Greenwich.

CHAPTER VII

THE TURN OF THE TIDE

MASTER THORNE was old, and the old live in their memories; these are real, and the events of the passing days are no more than the spume cast up by waters, to vanish with another day. Master Thorne, sitting in the darkness by his son could not grasp the changes that he heard as words.

"Edward dying? Now by the good St. Dunstan, that is an ill thing for the lad was the miracle of our day, being learned and gentle. Aye, I mind him well. Surely, Ralph, you have made much out of little. In the days of good King Harry——"

"These are other days," the armiger reminded him patiently.

"Alack, you have sent one Spanish noble to his long home, and mayhap others. So great a lord as Renard will harry you from the kingdom, lad. These be hard tidings, hard tidings. But you must abide in the cottage, Ralph, and I will betake me to London. They will have a welcome for Robert Thorne. His grace of Northumberland and Sir John will hear me out and bear a petition to the king."

"No, father, the twain great lords are dead long since, and the fortunes of the Thornes are low."

"So you say, Ralph, and so it is." The cosmographer sighed profoundly. " 'Tis cold of nights, and no one to sit by the fire."

"We have tasks to perform, sir, and may not sit at ease. Can you not understand? Renard is chancellor in all but name, now that Mary is to be chosen queen. Faith, we may have Philip coming out of Spain to woo her with a fleet of galleons."[*]

"A Spanish king!" breathed Master Thorne, a little aroused. "Nay then I must fare to court—did you not say it, Ralph?—with my charts and present them to Edward, my completed work, the magnum opus."

"Do so," cried his son, "and relate my story as you have heard it. Nay, hold! You said Durforth came here to solve a certain riddle of navigation. What was it?"

Here Master Thorne was on familiar ground, his memory stanch and quick.

"This Durforth, it comes to me now, is a Burgundian, and a man who loves the bawbees. He has an itch for gold in his fingers, and my lord Renard hath paid out to him some round sums. Aye, I mind he bought a pinnace with a dragon figurehead, to sail around like a lord in the northern seas. He did bespeak my aid in charting a course."

Master Thorne pondered a moment.

"The man is bold and a skilled navigant. He has coasted the shores of Norway to the north point where begins the Ice Sea. From there, the course he had in mind ran thus:

> "From the Wardhouse a hundred and twenty leagues to the arm of the inland sea,'south by east. A hundred leagues across the sea to the Town of Wooden Walls. From there the road lieth due south."

The armiger pondered this and shook his head.

"It hath the seeming of a cipher of words."

" 'Tis no cipher but plain speech."

"How, then?"

"Why the Wardhouse or Guardhouse lieth—so I have heard, for no Christian voyager hath set foot upon it—at the north point. 'Tis there in a tower or castle the Easterlings keep watch and ward upon the Ice Sea. Aye, and the Laps and reindeer folk."

"And what is the sea?"

"Aye, lad, there's the rub. South and east of the Wardhouse there standeth no sea upon my charts. Nor did Durforth know of any."

"He spoke of a town and a road. Surely here is a journey over land. Whither?"

"Why, you should steer north of east from the Wardhouse, if there is a passage open to Cathay. But, turning south and east, you would e'en come to the limbo between Christian lands and Cathay."

"And what is that?"

Master Thorne smiled unseen, and stifled a chuckle.

"Why, lad, do you seek the mysteries of cosmography? Some do say the elf king rules this region; others, a Christian king, Ivan the Terrible rules over Easterlings, Tartarians and Muscovites."

"What more?"

" 'Tis related that this monarch hath a great treasure of gold and silver, but that is hearsay."

Thorne, sitting by the dark hearth, his head in his hands, could make little of this. He sensed, rather than understood, a scheme afoot to betray Sir Hugh. Durforth, who was to lead the fleet around Norway, had another course in his mind, had counted so much upon it that he risked going to see the cosmographer and his charts.

Yet, even while he pondered, he was conscious that his father was moving about cheerfully; he heard a tankard clink and something gurgle into it.

"Ralph," quoth his father, "be the times what they may, I drink to your seafaring, with the good Sir Hugh. 'Tis a proud day and a glad day."

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[*] A year after Sir Hugh set out, Philip of Spain came into the Thames escorted by a hundred ships, to marry Mary. There ensued the short and calamitous reign known as that of "Bloody Mary," when the queen to satisfy her husband caused to be put to death the innocent Lady Jane Grey and her husband. Elizabeth, though imprisoned, was spared—a circumstance that the Spaniards had reason to regret later.

A cup was thrust into the armiger's hand and he tasted spiced wine.

"To your journey, sir," he said blithely. "Seek out the lady Elizabeth and her gentlemen, for she at least is stanch. But go swiftly hence. Tarry not the dawn, for each hour brings its peril. Fare ye well!"

THEY clasped hands at the door for the first time in many years. Master Thorne took his son's rapier and watched until Ralph had passed into the shadows across the highway. After listening a while, the old man kindled a fire in the hearth and fell to furbishing and polishing the weapon in his hands.

He was tired and bewildered by the swift passage of events and turned to his unfailing consolation, his maps and manuscripts of voyages. Lighting the candles on the table he settled down to pore over them and lost all account of time.

Dawn had marked the tree tops and a fresh wind set the candle flames to flickering when he looked up at last, having been for the past moment conscious of horses trotting along the road. The door had been thrown open and two men stood within it watching him.

One, a slender fellow in a broad plumed hat, Thorne did not know. The other was my lord Renard, attired for traveling, who pinched his chin between thumb and forefinger while his glance strayed from the sword and the two cups beside it on the table to the old man's charts and from them to Master Thorne.

"You keep late hours, sir," he observed, advancing and taking the weapon in his hand.

"Come to the fire, my lord," muttered the cosmographer. " 'Tis a fair cold night."

"A cold night to bide awake," nodded the envoy. "You are alone, too, I perceive. Yet I am informed that your son passed this way, going to London."

He raised his voice as if he had asked a question, his eyes full on the Englishman. Master Thorne, who was no adept at falsehood, held his peace, wondering what had occasioned this visit from such a notable. He did not think my lord Renard would hunt his son in person; indeed, the behavior of the envoy was far from alarming.

Master Thorne wished now that he had thought to conceal the sword, but his visitor seemed to attach no importance to it.

"I thought, my master," went on Renard slowly, "that you had no son."

"Nay, we had a way of quarreling," spoke up the cosmographer frankly, "but Ralph is a good lad."

His eyes, too, dwelt on the gleaming sword with more than a little pride.

The sallow face of the nobleman was impassive but he raised his heavy brows, and bent over the table to scan the charts and papers spread thereon. And now he frowned, picking up first one sheet, then another. Evidently he was able to judge of their contents, for a muttered exclamation escaped his lips when he examined the chart of the northern seas.

"Ah, you have skill in cosmography, 'tis clear. I seem to remember that you learned your craft in Spain in Seville."

"That is true," assented Master Thorne readily, pleased in spite of his distrust of the strangers, at the compliment.

"Such knowledge is priceless in these days of discovery," pursued my lord Renard amiably. "Perhaps it had been better for you if it were not. The merchants of Orfordnesse do not value you justly, but I——"

As idly as if he were casting dust from his fingers, he tossed the sheets he held into the fire, first handing the rapier to the gentleman who attended him. As the sword left his grasp he spoke swiftly under his breath and the other nodded understanding.

Master Thorne gave a great cry when he saw the flames catch at his precious maps. He ran around the table and plucked one of the smoldering sheets from the hearth.

As he did so, the gentleman who attended my lord Renard stepped forward and ran the rapier through the old man's body, withdrawing the blade in the same second and wiping it clean on his handkerchief, which he then tossed upon the floor.

Master Thorne made no further outcry. Swaying on his knees, he fell forward, his head dropping among the crackling logs. Stung by this fresh agony, he moaned and drew himself back rolling over on the hearth, the smoking paper still clutched in the hands that were pressed against his breast.

In spite of the odor of scorched flesh and singed hair my lord Renard would not leave the room until he had seen the last of the maps burned upon the hearth. Then he removed the lace handkerchief that he held against his nose.

"Here, D'Ayllon, lieth a prophet who had no honor in his own country. Leave the stripling's sword by the carcass of the sire. Now—" he considered the tableau attentively—"the yokels of this coast may cudgel their brains, and no harm to us."

D'Ayllon nodded indifferently.

"Still, signior, the son is living and may cause us to be harmed. And that Maestro Cabota——"

"*Pfaugh!* Cabota dodders to his grave, and the stripling we will silence in London."

Master Thorne's body was found within the hour by Cabot, who came to pay his call, and the Orfordnesse folk wagged their tongues apace. They agreed that the cosmographer, being a man of dark belief and uncertain religion, had come to a fitting end. The Thornes were ever a wild lot.

Some held that Ralph had slain his father, by reason of the rapier seen beside the body, and the complete disappearance of the armiger who had come up from London. Although town and countryside were searched by the bailifs, no trace of young Thorne was to be had.

Certain men who had gone down before midnight to the shore to watch the setting out of Sir Hugh and Richard Chancellor, and had been talking to the shipmen waiting by the boats drawn up on the strand, remembered that a strange youth had approached them, walking unsteadily and to all appearances drunk. Assuredly he must have been drunk, since he offered to join the shipmen to go upon the voyage to Cathay.

He was a well set-up lad they saw in the faint light, and the shipmen called him a lad of spirit. His soiled leather doublet and his features were smeared with blood—this struck them afterward—and he spoke thickly.

A burly man from the ships, with limbs like an ox and brass rings in his ears, haled the volunteer into one of the boats, and there he collapsed on the thwarts, perhaps from loss of blood, perhaps from the drink in him.

The other boat keepers argued that such a man would do them little good; but the boatswain with the earrings swore in a way that made the Orfordnesse folk stare that the *Edward* was short three wights and he would make a hand of the young yokel.

CHAPTER VIII

PETER DISCOURSES

A FORTNIGHT later Sir Hugh Willoughby's ships had left the coast of England far to the south, and with favorable winds were passing along Norway. Luck was with them for in a region where storms and mists were expected, they were able to keep in company. Every evening a cresset was kindled on the poop of the admiral ship, the *Bona Esperanza*, to mark its position during darkness, and every morning the two consorts would run up while the admiral ship lay to. Hails were exchanged, the number of sick reported to Sir Hugh, the course set for the day and a rendezvous appointed in case of separation by a storm.

This was the hour when the watch below came on deck, to harken to the daily fanfare of trumpets, and to muster for morning prayers at the image of Our Lady.

"Forby," observed Peter Palmer, boatswain of the *Edward*, "Sir Hugh be a man for discipline, aloft and alow. 'E's sailed under the king's colors many a time, and a rare, fine gen'leman 'e be. Brave as ever was. Though 'e's no hand for pilot work or laying a course."

And the boatswain spoke with the voice of authority, having voyaged to the far seas, to Malabar and Zipangu in Portuguese ships. He approved strongly of Richard Chancellor, the master of the *Edward*.

"Blast my liver, but 'e's a proper man, steady and determined-like. 'E reads to us lads out of the Bible itself, and 'monishes us like a minister of God. 'My bullies,' says 'e, 'forasmuch as all who sail the sea be standing on and off the port of the Almighty, we should stand by in readiness to face our Maker. So,' says 'e, 'let me hear no blaspheming, nor ribaldry, nor ungodly talk upon this ship.'

"And a fine thing it be," he concluded, "to have along of us a reverend gentleman as can grapple the —— himself. Now, —— me if it a'nt!"

Peter Palmer knew his own mind, and was quite ready to speak it upon all occasions. He was built on the lines of the *Edward* herself, broad and solid of timber. Although he must have weighed close to two hundred and fifty pounds he could move about as quickly as the cabin boy.

His freckled face was a mirror of good

nature, belied by the hard gleam of blue eyes that were always restless.

He took Thorne under his wing from the first, after the armiger had lain ill—what with fever from his wound and the tossing of the high-pooped merchant craft—for the first few days.

The ruddy boatswain brought him the half of a fresh-cooked cod as soon as he was able to eat, and plumped himself down in the berth across from his victim, chewing his thumb in silence until Thorne had finished the cod and the nuggin of wine that came with it.

"Captain's orders—fresh fish and wine for the hands that be taken sick. And why? Because the salt pork is cor-rupt, and the beer is vinegarish. Aye, as ever was. Likewise, the wine casks are not stanch, so the half of it hath leaked out."

"Hm."

Thorne passed a hand ruefully over the bristle of beard on his chin and throat.

"Some of the marchants are all for turning back," added Peter, "but Sir Hugh's not the man for that. Hark 'e, my master. What game might ye be a playing-of? Thou'rt no more a lout than I be."

"What, then?"

"Why, by token of that white shirt, thou'rt gen'leman born. Come now, what's the lay, a gen'leman born passing hisself off for a yeoman? Ah, that were a good song."

Grinning, even while his shrewd eyes dwelt on Thorne, the boatswain began in a very hearty voice:

"I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day.
I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas day in the marning."

Chuckling he slapped his thigh, and cocked his great head to one side.

"Ralph, lad, that were well sung!" And added in his stentorian whisper:

"In the dark ye fooled me. But now, ye talks like a gen'leman, drinks like a lord and eats dainty as a prince. Why come off to the ships, Ralph, lad?"

"Have you forgotten," asked Thorne, "that I was fuddled—seas-over?"

Peter scratched his head over the black hood that he wore ever about his massive shoulders and sconce.

"Why, no, Ralph, no. But ye sniggled me as to being a yokel. Y'are a gen'leman born. I say and so it is. Now mightn't ye be a sniggling of me as to being fuddled. Supposing, now, ye was sober? Eh? We had sore need of mariners, so I took off the first likely lad that showed in the offing. But supposing ye was sober; why ever did ye go for to be took off?"

He glanced around the narrow forecastle, lighted after a fashion by two small ports and reeking of the bilge. Smoke from the galley—the wind being over the stern—clouded it, and the odor of grease and burned meat vied with the stench of soiled garments.

"This fo'csle a'nt suited to a gen'leman's dis-position now. But y' are content to lie abed here. Most 'mazing content ye be, Ralph.

"So I says to myself, 'Peter, this young un's lying alow for a good and sufficient reason.' And what might that reason be? 'Peter,' says I, 'in all likelihood he does not wish to show his mug on deck for a while.' Until when? 'Why, Peter,' says I, 'until the coast of England lies well astern.' "

The blue eyed boatswain was not far wrong in his surmise, though Thorne's lean face told him little.

"I'm not a chap to ax questions," he went on, "and it's all one to me whether ye put a knife to the innards of another gen'leman, or summat else. Let bygones be bygones."

He held out a hairy fist and Ralph took it. Peter Palmer was the only man on the *Edward* who knew the manner of his taking off, and so long as the boatswain kept his counsel, no talk would arise to come to the ears of Master Chancellor. Ralph himself determined to keep both his identity and his mission secret for a while, until he could look around and get his bearings.

At first he had been disappointed to discover that he was not on Durforth's ship. Now he was glad of it.

On Durforth's vessel, the *Confidentia*, which was much smaller than the *Edward*, he did not think he could have escaped notice. And, if Durforth had knowledge of him in his present situation, the easiest fate he could expect would be to be cast into the bilboes.

Peter saw to it that he was provided with a heavy robe from the merchants' stores to fend off the cold, and a small slop chest, with needle and thread, a knife and a wrapping of frieze to sleep in, proceedings that aroused the curiosity of the shipmen who berthed in the forecastle and had experienced no such tender mercies from the boatswain. Until one day Peter haled the landsman into the depths of the ship.

Here he was turned over to a being who answered to the name of Jacks and was the ship's cook. His duties were to tend the galley fire, fetch the victuals to the mariner's mess on the main deck, to wash plates, swab out the galley and in general to do whatever Jacks was minded he should.

"Ho, a landsman!" grunted the cook.

"Ah," nodded Peter, "a landsman as is a fancy hand with dirk or fist. A man as has put better men than you, Jacks, where only the —— could find them. So speak him civil and keep your hand off him, or we'll have a new cook and fare better by the same token."

"Fare better!"

Jacks was blind in one eye and the other was askew in his head, giving him a limited range of vision, but a baneful stare when his feelings were aroused, as now.

"You sons o' bilge puncheons 'ud like pickles with your beer, and rum every time you spit, I'm thinking. Half the stores were rotting in the salt barrels when they were stowed."

"So ye say—" Peter winked at the armiger—"but *I* say it's enough and more to spoil the beer to have it under hatches along of you, Jacks."

He took Ralph aside for a word of advice.

"Bide here for a time. Y'are a landsman, mind, and Master Dickon and his bullies will stand for no favorites. Be a swabber for a while, then we'll make shift to have ye out of the orlop. By then thy natural mother, Ralph, 'ud not know ye for her son."

THIS proved to be true. For days Ralph labored in the dark hold, at duties that turned his stomach even more than the pitching of the *Edward*. Once, watched by the saturnine eye of Jacks, he tried to wash head and hands in a bucket of salt water and surveyed the result ruefully. Soot and smoke coated the grease that clung to his skin.

Once on the spar deck, during evening prayer when all hands except Jacks were mustered in the waist, Chancellor met him face to face and half frowned as if something about the landsman struck him as familiar. But at that moment a hail came from the masthead.

"Sail ho!"

That day they had entered a belt of fog and though the shore was scarce a league distant they could see it not. They were lying-to, upon command of Sir Hugh, near a village from which Chancellor had been able to procure a boatload of fowls, to eke out his scanty stock of meat. Ralph could smell the hay that the people on shore had been cutting and the fresh, strong odor of pine trees.

But by degrees, as he watched the curtain of mist from the windward rail, he became aware of another odor, less pleasing. Out of the mist a black vessel took shape—a long pinnace with two masts, only the foresail being set. It moved down the wind sluggishly, and he heard Chancellor mutter that it had the seeming of a pirate craft. Ralph wondered why such a small boat should venture to attack the *Edward*.

Chancellor sprang into the shrouds and bellowed through cupped hands:

"Stand off, or you will foul us. Keep to our lee, or take a shot!"

He repeated the warning in Dutch, but the pinnace kept its course. The master gunner, with some of the hands, climbed briskly to the fore deck of the *Edward* and whipped the tarpaulin from one of the calivers, while others ran below for shot and powder and Peter came up from the galley with a slow match that he had kindled at Jacks' fire.

The weather-beaten faces of the men about Ralph brightened at prospect of a fight. They were a rugged lot; many of them had sailed with Chancellor before and Peter dubbed them "tarry-Johns." Yet the master gave no order to issue swords and pikes to the crew.

His hail had not been answered, and before long all on the *Edward* saw the reason. The pinnace slid nearer, and veered away uncertainly. A man was visible now at the wheel, and another was perched under the bowsprit on the crudely carved dragon that served for figurehead.

Another pair hung from the yard on the foremast, and two others from the main yard.

They hung by the necks and turned slowly as the yards swung with a dry creaking. A puff of wind bore the pinnace almost under the *Edward's* counter and Ralph saw that the helmsman was as dead as the others, bound to the tiller. So, too, the sailor on the figurehead remained immovable, lashed to his place, his head sunk on his chest.

The rank smell of decay was stronger on the air. And then the black pinnace glided out of sight in the mist, vanishing without guidance from living hand and bearing with it that strange crew of inanimate beings

With its disappearance the spirits of the men on the *Edward* revived perceptibly, some saying that it must have been a plague ship, or a craft from Dane-marke that had been taken by pirates.

"Be that as it may," muttered Peter, "it bodes no good to us. Those chaps had been strung up for many a day by the looks of them, and still it keeps the sea."

"You are wide of the mark," put in another, who had made the voyage to Iceland. "Yon's the handiwork o' the Easterlings."

"What's them?" asked a young sailor, who was listening with all his ears.

"Why, the little people as keeps watch and ward upon the Ice Sea. Easterlings they be. They've set their hands to that pinnace."

"Save us!"

"Aye," nodded the old hand, "here we be up beyond the *Circulus Articus*."

"By what token?"

"By this token, bullies all. 'Tis now nine o' clock, and yet the light holds. Come on watch at three bells and the light will be upon us anew."

"Aye," assented Peter moodily. "The hours o' darkness be dim-inishing. But the powers o' darkness be a-growing and a-girding and a-coming about us."

AS IF to bear out the truth of his remark, the wind turned contrary and held the ships back. They seldom saw the sun now, except as a ball of silver hung in the mist. As the Iceland farer prophesied, the nights grew shorter instead of longer as the season advanced.

Hard bitten and callous as were the hands of the *Edward*, they were superstitious to a man, and the visit of the black pinnace had set them on the lookout for more omens. The very day they changed course from north to east, having rounded the North Cape, one of the men on Sir Hugh's ship reported that he had seen a mermaid in the half light of late evening.

He swore that the white body of a woman had appeared under the stern, a woman whose long hair was like seaweed, and who beckoned and smiled at him, before diving into the depths again. When she dipped out of sight he beheld clearly the scales of a fish and a great tail that whipped the water.

Both Peter and the Iceland-farer were agreed that the sight of the mermaid presaged death on board the *Bona Esperanza*. They recalled other occasions when shipmen who had been beckoned by women swimming upon the waters had fallen overboard in a storm.

The burly boatswain kept a careful rein on his own unruly tongue thereafter. Ralph he relieved from duty in the galley and made boatswain's mate, saying that the lad had done his work well and could help him upon the deck.

So the armiger enjoyed a good wash in fresh water, and persuaded the quartermasters to give him a new, clean leather jacket and hooded frieze shirt as a protection against the growing cold. The sailors believed that they were about to enter the Ice Sea, because they saw several whales, and noticed that Chancellor took his noon observation with more care than usual.

More than once Ralph caught sight of Durforth, when the little *Confidentia* drew abreast of them—the tall figure, clad in a robe of foxskins trimmed with ermine was unmistakable. He could even see the broad chain of gold the man always wore.

It was the day they saw the whales, the last of many upon which the circle of the sun was visible through the mist, that Durforth hailed the *Edward*. He had just completed his noon observation and held the backstaff in his hand.

Ralph, busy in the waist of the ship, caught a few words.

"Seventy degrees of latitude—the first of August, and soon the ice—Wardhouse."

Every hand of the watch on deck cocked an ear to hear Chancellor's reply, which came at once.

"It stands not with honor to turn back."

"We lack victuals to winter in the Ice Sea—a barren coast."

Chancellor's ruddy face darkened with anger, whether at Durforth's words or whether the master of the *Confidentia* had spoken within hearing of the crew Ralph did not know.

"Sir Hugh is general of this fleet. And we are for Cathay, not the Wardhouse."

Peter nudged the young landsman in the side with force enough to crack a rib.

"There's Master Dickon for ye! Aye, but he did not see the mermaid. Nor does he sour his throat with the beer in our butts."

Ralph glanced at the mariner curiously.

"Would you run from a woman, Peter?"

"Aye, younker, that would I. Signs and portents are sent for our understanding. Whatever befalls, some chap on the *Bona Esperanza* is doomed."

The big boatswain glanced at him sidewise and shook his head soberly.

"Lad, I be fair 'mazed at 'e. Thou'lt say next there is no black magic as well as white; aye, no powers of numbers or planets."

"It seems to me," quoth the armiger, "that a man stands or falls by his own deeds. I have come upon no spell that a sword would not sever."

Peter's great jaw fell open and he stared, round of eye.

"Now, —— take 'e, I mean, Our Lady save us! Lad, lad! I'll not gainsay the potency of Our Lady—" he nodded at the image on the mast—"but here we be on the Ice Sea; so Master Durforth did maintain, and who else should reck as well?

"Now Satan hath do-minions of his own, and if this be one of them, why hold hard, lad, and do not miscall the powers o' darkness. Especially—" he nudged his friend violently in the ribs— "*especially* if ye have the blood of another gen'leman on your soul."

"If we are truly entering the Ice Sea," responded Thorne, "I must speak with Master Dickon, at once. Do you see to it, Peter."

To his surprize the boatswain rolled off without objection or question, and the armiger braced himself for the task of accusing Durforth on his unsupported word. By now he knew it was no light matter so to bring in question the master of a ship—this knowledge had impelled him to hold his peace, until he could win the confidence of Chancellor. But the pilot-major seemed to avoid Thorne.

However, Thorne walked toward the poop rail, having fully decided to go to Chancellor and tell him his own side of the story.

CHAPTER IX

THE RENDEZVOUS

CHANCELLOR was seated in the narrow stern cabin by the table on which lay astrolabe and backstaff. Powerful hands clasped behind his curly head, he nodded as the landsman entered.

"You asked for a word with me, my lad?"

"Yes, Master Dickon. And I pray that you will hear me to the end, for this is a matter that I may no longer keep to myself."

Gripping the deck beam overhead, to steady himself against the roll of the ship, Thorne began his tale.

"I am Ralph Thorne, son of him called the Cosmographer, and I fought Master Durforth at Orfordnesse in your presence."

The master of the *Edward* showed no surprize at this, but as the youth went on to unfold all that had taken place in London, he fell serious and his eyes never left the speaker's face.

"It is ill doing," he made response in his slow fashion, "to lay a charge against a man without proof, on hearsay and suspicion."

"That is true, Master Dickon. But so is my tale."

"According to your story, you came secretly to the ship. Since then you have lain hidden. How am I to take your word against that of a gentleman?"

Thorne felt his cheeks grow hot as he leaned forward, checking a harsh retort with an effort.

"Sir, my presence here should be a surety of my mission, which is to serve the king."

"Was the murder of the honest gentleman your father included in this mission?"

"My father? Nay, he is alive and hearty."

Something in the face of the older man choked the words in his throat.

"My father—what of him?"

"Within an hour of our embarking Master Robert Thorne was slain with your sword in his cottage, and all his maps were burned on the hearth."

As the youth made no response, Chancellor added slowly:

"The truth of this is established by Master Cabot, who, after bidding us farewell on the shore, went to your father's cottage to have speech with him. Finding him as I have said, Master Cabot returned to the shore and came out to us in a skiff, to ask if any upon the ships had knowledge of the deed or of my lord Renard."

"What of Renard?" asked Ralph through set teeth.

"He was to have escorted the venerable pilot back to London, but, missing him in the village, apparently went on alone."

Ralph bent his head a moment, touching with his hand the rude drawing on the table, so unlike the delicate tracery of his father's charts.

It came into his mind that the Cosmographer would never, now, behold him returning with the king's navigants, and the certainty that Master Thorne was no longer living filled him with a longing to have lived otherwise. With his own sword!

"Sir," he cried, "I do hold it ill of you that you should have thought me guilty of my father's murder. One thing I must ask of you—nay, two. A sword and to be put aboard the *Confidentia* where Durforth is."

"Not so."

Chancellor rose, stooping to avoid the deck beams overhead, and held out his hand.

"I did no more than test you with words. A man may lie with his tongue, yet his eyes must e'en bear witness of his honesty. Your eyes are honest. 'Tis so I judge a man."

"Your friends," assented the armiger, "do say that you are just, Master Chancellor. I have found you so."

The big pilot shook his tawny head as if impatient of a burden that was not to his liking.

"In these treacherous days when poison is in the very air of England, I may not easily know who is friend and who is unfriend. Before this I had other evidence that approved your innocence."

"How?"

"A ship's master is more careful than you reck. When Peter rowed me out that night, I questioned him of the new hand that he had trepanned."

Chancellor smiled and when he did so his weatherbeaten face glowed with a kindly light.

"Peter's a rare rogue—cheats the gallows with every breath; yet is he loyal to those he serves. None so long before you appeared upon the shore he wandered off to the ale house to wet his throat. There he heard the tumult raised by my lord Renard's fellows when they sought to put an end to you.

"Peter hath the Spanish gab and heard something of their secret talk. I examined you straitly while you lay unconscious, and knew you for Robert Thorne's son."

"Yet told me naught of his fate!"

"It is not easy to relate such news, my lad. You lay ill. Moreover," the pilot added quietly, "I will not join in fellowship with other men if they be not open with me. I bade Peter put you to test, the which he did after a fashion of his own."

He motioned Thorne to a seat beside him in the stern casement and put his hand on the youth's shoulder.

"It was not in my mind to deal hardly by you. 'Twas best you should lie hidden, lest Durforth come to know of you and demand your punishment of Sir Hugh who holds him in much esteem."

"And what, Master Dickon," cried the armiger," is your thought of Durforth? I will face him and accuse him of abetting my father's murder—which was by Renard's hand I will swear."

"Master Durforth was on his ship when it took place."

"It is true that the pair of them slew my father," insisted Thorne from set lips, "and I shall take vengeance for that black deed."

"But Durforth we may not accuse. Others might have caused the moldering victuals to be put in the holds. Durforth is a skilled navigator, and hath on the *Confidentia* a rare globe showing the passage we must follow."

"What of the course he laid down, to the inland sea?"

"Faith," smiled the pilot, "I would give half my share in this venture to know the truth of that. He hath made no mention of it in council. 'Tis a riddle that will some day resolve itself.

"My lad, I will enroll you among the gentlemen adventurers. You will be the fourth upon this ship. We will observe closely Durforth's actions, and know whether he be honest man or rogue. On the morrow the council meets in the cabin of Sir Hugh and I will ask Durforth of this inland sea and Town of Wooden Walls."

Chancellor was a man slow of decision but one who would not draw back once he had made up his mind. Seeing this, Thorne shook his head, yet would not gainsay the plan of an older and wiser man. He thought that the master of the *Confidentia* was too shrewd for Chancellor's questioning, and in this he was right.

BUT it fell out not as they had planned. The mist thinned away steadily though the near-by shore was still hidden. They could hear the surf breaking on the rocks, and the cries of rooks and gulls. Once the lookout of the *Edward* sighted a skiff with one man in it—a dwarf whose fishskin garments glittered with spray.

He pulled out to stare at the *Edward* which was making little way in the heavy cross seas. And then, with a glance to windward he bared pointed teeth in a soundless laugh and pulled away for the shore.

The three ships bore in, and presently sighted the cliffs of a headland. But the wind which had been rising steadily, grew to a full gale, twisting and buffeting the little vessels until Sir Hugh made signal to put about and gain sea room entrance into the bay being impossible.

A lowering sky seemed to press the very masts of the *Edward*, and through the sweeping cloud wrack Ralph caught a glimpse of the silver circle of the sun, low over the land. He noticed that the cries of the birds had ceased, and that the mariners were taking in all but the main- and foresails.

Obeying a second signal from the admiral-ship, Chancellor, whose vessel was the handiest of the three, ran within hail of Willoughby on the lee side. The shout of the captain general came to them faintly over the thud and hiss of the waters and the whining of rigging.

"The rendezvous is Wardhouse. A' ——'s name, Dick, stand by me."

The next moment the dim light was eclipsed as if a lamp in the sky had been put out; a blast heeled the *Edward*, splitting the main course. As far as Thorne could see the horizon was a void, laced with the white of flying foam.

Out of the blackness the white crests of waves roared at him, crashed on the bow, filling the air with spume, and raced aft to merge into the boiling wake. He propped himself against the bulwarks and hooked one arm around a backstay, bending his head to snatch a breath of air.

He did not dare to stir from this post of vantage, but the able shipmen he could see laboring at the jeers, where the main-yard with its shreds of sail was being lowered away and secured. Ever and anon he heard Chancellor's shout—no louder than a whisper—and the answering pipe of Peter's whistle.

For a while he watched the stern lantern of the *Bona Esperanza* pitching in the murk ahead of them. Sir Hugh was carrying more sail than Chancellor, and drifted farther to leeward, so that presently the point of light winked out. Ralph, awed by the racing seas, kept the deck, full of wonder and interest, and half believing that the ship would break into pieces the next moment.

So it happened that some hours later—he judged it to be the mid hours of the short night—he heard a startled cry from the fore deck.

"Ice on the weather bow!"

From the topgallant poop behind him came the hoarse bellow of Burroughs, the master.

"Helm hard a-weather! Veer out the foresheet to wear ship!"

For a moment the *Edward* seemed to hang back and Thorne loosened his hold to peer over the side. He could see no ice, nothing save a vague blur of white where the seas were breaking. Then the ship brought-to on the other tack with a lurch and he lost his balance, rolling into the lee scuppers.

A rush of water drenched him, and he struggled to his knees, coughing and shivering, when a powerful hand caught him under the shoulder and drew him erect. He made out the great bulk and the reeking leather garments of the boatswain.

"Gunner," Chancellor's clear voice rang out, "fire me a caliver to leeward."

The wind all at once seemed to Thorne to grow bitter and chill as in mid-winter. He waited until one of the small guns of the forecastle flashed and roared.

"Are we doomed, Peter?" he cried. "Is our time run out?"

The boatswain, who had been peering over the bulwark, roared with laughter.

"'Tis the younker! Nay Master Ralph, thou'lt live yet to be hung. This is no more than a fairish blow, a goodish blow, ye might say. The caliver was fired to warn the others of the ice, if so be they are within sight or hearing, which I doubt."

THE *Edward* rode out the storm and headed back to the coast without sighting either of the consorts. Chancellor thereupon set about finding the Wardhouse. He picked up the two headlands from which they had been driven by the gale and ran east for a day along a coast that was brown and bare of trees, with snow lying on the heights.

This snow, the Iceland mariner maintained, never melted, a thing that seemed beyond belief to the other shipmen. But they saw nothing of any habitation, much less a town.

They did sight a clump of islands lying several miles offshore, and Chancellor decided to put out and land upon one of them. The *Edward* was in sore need of both wood and water.

The island they selected was overgrown with stunted firs and birches on the higher ground, and a rocky pinnacle offered a good lookout. Burroughs had noted a likely cove for anchorage where he thought they would find fresh water.

The work was not at an end when those on the ship saw the boat put out without the casks, and half the men. Peter, coming over the side, reported to Chancellor that a man sent to the height had seen a dwelling near the center of the island, where the forests hid it from view from the sea.

"What manner of dwelling?"

"A great house it be, with wall and tower."

"Then it is the Wardhouse. For this is the northernmost point of land, and must lie along the seventieth degree of latitude. Aye," Chancellor added thoughtfully, "no other ships from our part of the world have ventured as far as this."

He ordered Robert Stanton, master gunner, a dour man, except in liquor, with two gentleman, Thorne and a half dozen hands to make ready to accompany him to the shore. The gentlemen donned corselets and girded on their swords, taking also hand guns, while, the mariners were content with pikes and cutlasses. Leaving the ship in charge of Burroughs, they went off in the pinnace.

On the gravel of the beach they noticed marks where other boats had been drawn up—fishing craft or ketches, the Icelander said. And Stanton hit upon a beaten path that led in the direction of the house. It bore the signs of frequent use, but no heel marks were visible. And it took them up through the pines, past gullies where snow lay in deep patches, to a clearing where only ferns and a kind of flowering moss grew.

A stout log palisade stood in the center of the open space and a thatched roof and the bole of a rude stone tower were to be seen above it. Chancellor, bidding his men look to their arms, went up to the gate and thrust it open.

"Christians have been here before us by token of yonder grave and the cross above it," one of the gentlemen observed, and they went on with more assurance to the door.

It opened as readily as the gate.

"Ho, within! Have you no welcome for way farers?"

The cry went unanswered, and the house was found to be deserted, though signs of occupancy were not wanting. In the hall were stacked bales and fardels of traders' goods, broad cloth, kerseys and raisins, and round pewter. A book of reckoning bearing the name of one John Andrews, of Cairness, lay upon the bundle.

This book disclosed no more than lists of barter, by which Chancellor made out that the cloth and pewter had been exchanged in the past for such things as furs, tallow and fish. It did mention that these shipments had been made to and from the Wardhouse.

"So a Scotsman, Andrews, hath been before us hither at the Wardhouse," he observed, more surprized than chagrined at the discovery. "A bold trafficker, by all that's marvelous!"

"Why this Andrews had his lady with him," remarked the gunner, who had been exploring the tower. "At least divers skirts and cloaks and other gear lie up aloft."

By the size and number of the cooking pots that were hung, neatly polished, by the hearth, a fair sized company had dwelt in the house not long since. Chancellor ordered a search of the island, and posted another man in the lookout on the peak.

By evening they were sure that the island was inhabited by no more than foxes and squirrels and a host of sea birds that circled, screaming, about the invaders. So the ship was left with Master Burroughs and a half dozen, and the main company repaired to the palisades, glad enough to set foot ashore again and gathered around the great fires.

The trader's stores Chancellor would not touch, saying that they belonged to another.

FOR six days they rested at the Wardhouse, keeping watch for Sir Hugh's two vessels, but sighting nothing except several icebergs that drifted near the island, and on the sixth day a large pack to the north. Chancellor went to the lookout to study this and called a council that evening.

"'Tis now seven days that we abode at the tryst," he said slowly," and before now Sir Hugh should have put in appearance. Wherefore, I deem that something has befallen him, to make him change his plans, and it is my wish to go on alone. What say you, my masters?"

Burroughs and the two merchants agreed with him, and one of the gentlemen adventurers added a word.

"Please you, Master Dickon, we grieve sorely that misfortune hath been the lot of the two goodly ships and our companions. But, for the reason of the love we bear you, we will fare on with right good cheer."

"Sir Hugh and his men are worthy of better fortune, I must needs say. I have reason to think—" he hesitated—"a traitor hath led them elsewhere. I know not whither. But each day the cold increaseth and if we do not venture forth, the passage will be closed to us by ice."

At this the Icelander moved forward from the outer circle to where Chancellor sat on a stool close to the fire. Knuckling his forehead, he asked leave to speak.

"Save ye, my master, and if so be ye will let me have my say——"

"Say what you will," put in the pilot, to encourage him, for the man was ill at ease.

"Thankee, Master Dickon, thankee! If we weigh with a southeast sun* we will come before long upon the great ice pack, which we may not pass around. Then we must make a landfall and endure the winter as best we may. Saving your respect, the winter in this sea is perilous. Now, God be praised, we have a fair harbor here at this place, and the good Sir Hugh may join us if we abide here."

"Honestly spoken," nodded the pilot. "And to my mind we go into danger, the greater since Sir Hugh hath left us. But, my masters, I hold it dishonorable to avoid a great attempt for fear of danger."

"Aye," cried the others. "'Tis so we think, Master Dickon."

Thorne, who had been frowning into the fire, looked up quickly.

"By your leave, sir, it is in my mind that we should leave a man in the Wardhouse."

Chancellor looked a silent question.

"Sir Hugh," explained the armiger, "knoweth not that a traitor is in his company. If so be the captain general should come to this island after we have sailed, who is to tell him? And how is he to know the course we follow?"

"Ha! We could leave a written message."

"A writing, so please you, might fall into other hands. 'Tis clear that folk do come to this Wardhouse. And, by the same token, we hit on this rendezvous only by chance A man left here could signal to Sir Hugh from the peak, if the sails were sighted."

This aspect of the situation had not struck the pilot who was readier for action than planning.

"That is true," he nodded, "but even so, I will not order one of my shipmen to bide alone on this island in peril of his life."

"Nay, Master Dickon," Thorne smiled, "I will stay here. For, look you, I am of no use upon a ship. None knoweth so well as I the warning that should come to Sir Hugh's ears. As for peril, I would face a thousand Laps and all their sorcery rather than another storm like the last. Nay, indeed here is scant peril, for if you come not to death, you will return hither to search for me."

"Aye, that we will." It was Chancellor's turn to smile. "Lad, I fear me you are disposed to have the blood out of Durforth, will-he, nill-he!"

"Aye, that I will," responded Thorne so promptly that the others stared and laughed, knowing for their part little of his suspicions or his desire to avenge his father.

"Then let it be so. But I will not leave you alone." Chancellor turned to the ring of faces that glowed ruddy in the firelight. "My masters, you have heard the talk between us. It is expedient that we man the Wardhouse. This youth maintains that the lesser peril is his, but I think otherwise. I'll order no man of mine to abide with him, yet such is my desire."

When no one spoke up, he glanced at the young adventurer who had first assented to going on.

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*i. e. sail east.

"Nicholas Newborrow, what say you?"

"I say this, in all due respect." Newborrow flushed, and fingered the clasp of his cloak. "I dare what any man dare, but in this unknown part of the world we face no human foes. Whither passed Sir Hugh? What of the good men and true he had with him? Whence came this grave?"

He pointed through the gray vista of the enclosure to the rough wooden cross.

"Whither fared the humans who were in this Wardhouse none so long before our coming? We saw no boat put off from the island."

"It is idle," quoth Chancellor, thrusting out his long chin—for he liked not Newborrow's words or their effect on the listeners—"to wonder upon that which we have not seen."

"We have seen, my master, this place where night cometh not at all, but a continual light shining upon a huge and mighty sea. Fare on with you I will, but here I will abide not. This is an evil place."

"So that is your mind. What of the others?"

A brief silence fell, and after a moment Peter Palmer thrust aside the shipmen in front of him and greeted his leader. His round face was knotted with uneasiness.

"A plague on them that hangs in stays when there's work to be done. I'll bide with the younker. If so be my time's run out, here is Christian soil and sepulcher."

He pointed to the grave and its cross.

"I can ill spare you, boatswain." Chancellor thought it over with palpable concern. "Still, you and Thorne are mates, and that is good. Stay then, and God keep you."

To the armiger he added:

"My course I can not give you, save that we sail east from here, and—I fear me—must winter on the Ice Sea. So, if you follow, watch the shore for the ship and huts. Master Burroughs, see to it that Thorne has weapons and victuals enough for two men for a twelvemonth. We hoise our sails at the third running out of the glass."

CHAPTER X

PETER INTERPRETS AN OMEN

"AND now," quoth Peter closing one eye and laying a finger along his massive nose, "we be our own masters, ye being captain and I mate, as it were. In a year from now we'll be living at our ease, a-riding in coaches and a-swearing hearty at our own serving knaves, like gen'lemen to the manor born."

They were then sitting at their ease in the Wardhouse hall which seemed bare and gloomy despite a roaring fire, since the departure of Chancellor and his company.

"You sang another tune, Peter," responded Thorne with amusement "two days agone."

For two days the boatswain had worked like a Trojan, carrying up from the shore the gear and arms left them by Burroughs—a serviceable harquebus with three barrels, a hand gun for Thorne, who now wore a sword. Peter had his own cutlas, and had gleaned from the *Edward* a small keg of powder, and a cutty ax.

They had a cask of brandy in addition to a butt of the familiar and detested beer, which, nevertheless Peter preferred to water, salt fish in plenty and a little beef, with a liberal allowance of biscuit and cheese and olive oil.

All this they had stowed in the hall. They had taken turns climbing the peak to keep watch on the sea and cutting firewood, which Thorne stacked inside the palisade.

"Well," ruminated the boatswain, drawing himself a mug of brandy, "that was afore Master Dickon cut us adrift. When we sailed along of him I obeyed orders and kept my tongue between my teeth. But all the while I had tidings of that which will make us rich as lords."

"On this island?"

"The —— take this island! Nay, here's the lay, Master Ralph. Gold and silver to be had for the picking up. Or else to be traded for—a knife or piece of pewter, look ye, for a fair pound of red gold."

Thorne hitched nearer the blaze, for the chill of the place touched his back with invisible, icy fingers.

"We are a long way from Cathay," he yawned.

" 'Tis not Cathay."

Peter took a sip of the brandy and licked his thick lips.

"I've sailed the seas I have, with the Portingals. And evil shipmen they be, but full o' knowledge and tidings of the unknown world. At Fermagosta I first heard tell of this gold. Then at the Texel, when the Dutch merchants had looked too long on the cup. By reason of what I heard, I shipped along of Master Dickon."

He drained the mug and tossed it over his shoulder.

"Here's the tale. Both the Spaniards and Hollanders talk of a certain prince whose dom-inions lie between Christiandom and Cathay. A long way it is to this prince, and now the Polanders and other pagans and the Easterlings be at war, one with another. So the way by land is closed. The name this prince bears is Ivan."

Expectantly, he paused, seeing that his companion was giving close heed to his words.

"Ivan," he repeated. "And in the Texel ale shop 'twas said that Ivan's land o' gold and silver lieth south by southeast from this Wardhouse."

"Southeast!" The armiger sat up abruptly. "Why, so lieth the course given Durforth by my lord Renard. How distant is this land of—of gold?"

"A mooh's journey."

"Not so far. Durforth's reckoning——"

After considering the matter, Thorne related to his companion all that he knew of Renard and his agent. And the boatswain's prompt reply surprized him.

"Sweet doxies and dells! It fits like a merlyn-spike in a man's fist. Look ye! The Spaniards may not adventure to Prince Ivan by land, so one is sent by sea. For the Spaniards are not wont to endure peril without reason. Wherefore, you and I will set forth this day week, to seek the land of gold."

"Set forth? How?"

"Why in a week we may build us a fair raft of dried wood, secured with rope and pegs of wood. We'll take the gear and victuals and the firelocks. 'Tis no more than two leagues to the main. Sweet lad, we'll trade with the pagans of this outlandish prince and make our fortunes."

His red-veined eyes gleaming cheerfully, he rolled to his feet and filled two mugs at the brandy cask. One of these he held out to Thorne who was sunk in a brown study by the fire.

"What, bully lad! Here's luck. May good Saint Dunstan guard us from the Horned One!"

Under his breath he added, remembering that he stood, perhaps, on unhallowed ground—

"May the—— deal with us in kindly wise."

"With what would you trade, Peter?"

The big shipman jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the bales of goods that had been found with the book of one John Andrews. Placing his finger against his nose again, he tossed off his brandy and heaved a pleasant sigh.

"With yon."

"Softly, my shipmate! That is not ours for the taking. And how would you add goods to gear, and carry the same overland?"

Peter's face fell and he scratched his head. His imagination ran no farther than reaching the coast with all the spoil.

"Welladay, one thing at a time, Master Ralph. Belike, fortune will aid us one way or another."

"It will not, for the reason that I will abide on this island, having pledged my word."

"Now, the plague take ye for a dolt," muttered the boatswain earnestly. "If Sir Hugh come not he lieth at the bottom of yonder sea. Or else treachery hath been brewed against us and Master Dickon."

BUT argue as he would, and he did right soulfully, Peter could not budge Thorne from his decision a whit. He ended by swearing up and down that he would go in search of the promised land alone. But the next day he showed no signs of readiness to set out; in fact felt sulky and sat in the house hunched over the fire.

Thorne did not appear to notice his ill behavior, but labored at the wood until he judged it midday; then he bade Peter briefly to take a turn on the lookout.

With an ill grace and much grumbling the boatswain obeyed, and set out for the "masthead," as he termed it. But within an hour he hove into sight again, much more rapidly than he had departed. He was panting from the depths of his lungs and stumbling over the rocky ground.

"Stand by, Master Ralph!" he bellowed hoarsely. "Look aloft. The sweet Mary aid us—look aloft!"

Thorne put down his ax and glanced at the hill, then at the fringe of firs and the misty gloom of the rock gullies.

"The sky," croaked Peter, staggering through the gate of the stockade, "yonder to windward."

Thinking that his companion had

glimpsed a sail or had been beset by enemies of some kind, the armiger surveyed the horizon eagerly. And presently, having beheld what Peter had seen, he frowned. Arching high over their heads, a rainbow stood against a cloudbank in the sky. But this rainbow was inverted, glowing with a myriad colors where it circled almost to the tree tips, and fading into nothingness where its ends merged with the clouds. He had never seen its like before.

Being unable to account for this phenomenon, he held his peace while the shipman struggled to regain his breath.

"Master Ralph, I have seen the Southern Cross over a ship's mast; I have seen the eye of the Big Bear; but never a rainbow capsized. 'Tis an omen—daddle me else."

"'Tis a rainbow, no more."

Peter eyed the youngster with dark triumph.

"Master Ralph, the mariners o' the *Esperanza* saw a mermaid come up out of the waters. Aye, an omen, that, as ever was. And where be they now?"

Seeing that his companion was no whit cast down by this comparison, Peter went on stubbornly.

"And now our time is come. What d'ye think on it?"

"Think? That you have guzzled the brandy overmuch."

"Now, shiver my soul else, that is ill said. Look you here, Master Know-All: When I came down from the masthead yonder, the very beasties of the wood were up and about. Aye, they know when an ill wind is to ward. Wolves and bears, they were a-capering and a-rushing all about me, through the trees."

"There are no wolves, nor bears on this island,"

"I laid my deadlights on them. They were hiding, crafty-like, a-slipping and a——"

"Nonsense—"

"On two legs, Master Ralph. A-peering at me they were."

THORNE was puzzled by Peter's statement, stoutly reiterated when he questioned the boatswain anew that he had seen bears on the path to the lookout. He reflected that Sir Hugh's men had made only a casual examination of the island, and such animals might have remained unseen in the patches of woods. Bear's meat would add splendidly to their larder, and he decided to try his hand at hunting.

Taking up the crossbow with its winder and a few shafts—this weapon being both handier and more accurate than the harquebus—he left the palisade.

A heavy mist was blowing in, and the chill of it struck through his light cloak. It swept like smoke athwart the line of the forest, rendering him for the moment subject to the illusion that the pines and the rock gullies were moving past him while he was standing still.

Under the mesh of the wood the fog did not penetrate, and he walked hard and fast to stir up his circulation. The gale whined overhead, and the piping of curlews and croaking of gulls filled the space with tumult.

The wood opened out in time, and he passed through a labyrinth of scrub oak, all bent in one direction by the winds of countless years. Until now he had not known that he had come a full two leagues to the other end of the island. But for the moment he paid no attention to his surroundings.

High and clear and yet faintly a voice was to be heard, a human voice, dwarfed by the note of the wind. It reached him in snatches, and he could not be certain of its direction until he reflected that it must come down the wind.

As he rounded a mass of rocks, coated with moss, he heard it clearly and stopped in his tracks. The voice was a woman's, and she was singing an old ballad:

"As I was walking all alane
I heard twa corbies making a mane;
The tane unto the t'other did say,
'Where sall we gang and dine to-day?'

" '—In behint yon auld fail dyke
I wot there lies a new-slain knight;
And naebody kens that he lies there,
But his hawk, his hound, and lady fair.' "

A woman's voice was the last thing he had expected to hear, and Thorne paused to wind his crossbow and fit a shaft in the slot. Where a woman was, in this island of the Ice Sea, men must be, and it behooved him to draw near with care.

He pushed between two boulders and looked out into a mist-shrouded glen. On the far side, in some high bracken and fern he made out the form of a deer, with its antlered head pointed fairly in his direction.

Surprize and excitement brought his crossbow to his shoulder. He pressed the trigger when the stag moved—the eagerness of the hunter strong upon him. The shaft sped and the deer vanished, not bounding away, but sinking, as it seemed to him, into the ground.

> "Many a one for him make mane,
> But none sall ken where he is gane;
> O'er his white bones, when they are bare,
> The wind sall blaw for evermair."

The voice stopped on an unfinished note and there fell the familiar silence with its monotone of the gale overhead. Thorne ran forward, and sought eagerly in the ferns for the prey that he thought he had slain.

He found nothing, neither deer nor shaft. Nor, indeed, any sign of the singer, though he hunted through the broken ground until he came out on the shore and saw the line of surf an angry white under the leaden gray of the mists.

"Are you friend or foe?" he called and, after waiting a moment, "I'll harm you not."

But the only response was the impatient and mocking calling of the birds.

Taking his way home, his eye fell on a shaft half buried in the ground, and he took it up believing it was the bolt he had shot. It proved, however, to be an arrow, such as he had never seen before. It was a small shaft, feathered with black crows' feathers and bearing two small iron heads. After inspecting it, he thrust it into his belt and charged his crossbow anew.

For a while he quested along the ridges, until, the mist thickening, he knew his search vain and turned to the Wardhouse.

When he told Peter all that had taken place on the shore, the boatswain nodded indifferently.

"Aye, it were a pixie or a wood troll, or mayhap a Robin Goodfellow. Faint and clear it sung, say ye? Why, it were an-hungered. Ye should have left it a bit of a sup."

"But I saw naught, Peter."

"And why should ye, Master Ralph? 'Tis sartain and sure that pixies dwell in cromlechs, which is to say hollow mounds, beneath the sod. Where rocks stand, like a circle, with linden trees, keep your weather eye out for trolls and such-like."

Thorne was far from satisfied with this. Had a ship come to the island? If so, where was it anchored? Were there natives, pagan folk, about the Wardhouse, and were they invisible? He could have sworn there were no deer on the island, which was too small for a herd; yet he had seen one.

CHAPTER XI

THE SEA MAIDEN

A TOUCH on his arm awakened him from the deep sleep of early morning. The hall was visible in the half light that never quite left the island. Somewhere he heard Peter snoring comfortably.

The woman who stood by his couch, whose hand had touched his arm, held her finger on her lips. She was no taller than one of the great bales of goods beside her, and she was swathed from head to foot in a heavy sea cloak. Only two braids of hair of the brightest red gold were visible.

"You may not abide in this place," she said softly. "You must get you gone from here."

Her eyes, he noticed, were dark and they glowed with excitement. Her age he could not guess, but manner and voice were youthful, and the voice was that of the singer of the day before.

"Why?" he asked briefly, watching her face.

It was characteristic of the armiger that he showed no surprize at her presence. She was here, and in due time he would know all about that.

"The Easterlings are angered, lad. They will not endure you more."

"Why are they angry?"

"You shot a shaft at one; besides, you hold the Wardhouse and they would have it for my comfort. What seek you here?"

Thorne rose to his feet, and she stepped back as if to ward him off.

"Nay, sir, touch me not, for that would be your death."

"Here are threats and warnings," quoth the armiger impatiently. "But no sense. Mistress, I have loosed me no shaft at any pagan, nor have I a mind to harm you. Come, we will build the fire anew and you shall rede me this riddle."

He turned to call Peter to go for more wood, but again the girl in the sea cloak checked him in his purpose.

"Nay, let the lout sleep. The Easterlings have no love for him and they would slay him out of hand if he came near me."

"Now by my faith," growled the youth, "this is ill hearing. If any man lifts hand against Peter I will put my sword through him."

The girl smiled at this, yet there was anxiety in her eyes, which traveled beyond Thorne to the far corners of the hall. And he, following her gaze, became aware of shapes that stood without the narrow windows—of heads, covered with the fur of animals, and, once, of a form that resembled a deer with spreading antlers.

These, he knew, were men wearing bear and deer skins, but men so stunted that they stood no higher than his shoulder. And each one, with bow and arrows ready in hand, stirred restlessly as if ill at ease. Fear or uneasiness in savages and animals he knew to be a portent of danger. And his sword and pistols would avail little against their arrows.

It had been Peter's watch, and, judging by his snores, these folk of the island had taken possession of the palisade with small trouble. So reflecting, he brought wood himself, laid twigs on the embers of the hearth. When flames crackled and gripped the logs his gray eyes turned to the girl questioningly.

"And now, the tale, child," he said calmly, stretching his hands to the blaze.

She had seen that he was aware of her followers, and she glanced at him with fleeting curiosity, one hand smoothing back the hair from her forehead. The fire tinted her thin cheeks with color and made her fair indeed. Yet she was unconscious of this charm of hair and eyes and voice.

"If I tell what you would know," she whispered not to awaken Peter, "will you pledge me your word that you and the churl will leave the island so soon as may be?"

Thorne considered this and shook his head.

"I may not do that, for I have sworn an oath to abide here."

"Ah, that would avail you naught, for you would lie under the sod with a cross upon your grave."

"Like the other?"

Thorne nodded at the palisade.

In a flash he saw that he had hurt the girl; her eyes glistened with tears and she bent her head, looking into the fire, her hands clasped on her breast.

"Peace, I pray you, sir. That is my father's grave. He was not slain by Easterlings, but by pirates who have e'er now made atonement for their ill deed."

When he still kept silent, she saw fit to tell him her name.

She was Joan Andrews, daughter of Andrews the trader. He was Scotland born, and had come in recent years to the Wardhouse by way of the Orkneys and the Norway coast, impelled to this course by sight of gold among the natives. This season he had taken Joan on the trip for the first time, and had met with misfortune, being followed to the Wardhouse by a pinnace with a dragon figurehead, manned by lawless Burgundians.

These had attacked the trader, killed him, and loaded his goods on their vessel which was anchored in the harbor. Andrews' cutter they had sunk a short distance from the island. But Joan had escaped from the Wardhouse after the death of her father, choosing to fly to some few Laps who had come to the island to trade rather than to trust to the mercies of the pirates.

The Easterlings, she explained, had a mound dwelling at the other end of the island, a hollowed-out knoll which was entered by a tunnel hidden from sight in the rocks.

The pirates might easily have escaped in their boat, but, unaware of the presence of the Easterlings, scattered over the island to search for the missing girl, and so fell victim to the arrows of the savages. The goods of the trader Andrews were brought back to the Wardhouse for safe keeping, until a large sailing skiff could be fetched to convey them to the mainland.

Before this vessel arrived, the English ship came into the harbor, and the Easterlings hid themselves with the maiden in their underground dwelling. They watched the *Edward* sail off and were astonished to find two men left on the island. These they had decided to kill, believing them kin to the pirates.

JOAN ANDREWS had seen Thorne the day before, and by his bearing and voice thought him English and of gentle blood. She had begged the Laps as best she could with signs and her few words of their speech to hold their hands until she could speak with the men in the Wardhouse.

Thorne considered her story and went to the heart of the matter with a word.

"Do these Easterlings cherish you, Mistress Joan?"

"My father ever dealt with them fairly, for such was his way. They have been kind to me. Aye, they be not evil-minded, though foul of feature. But command them I may not, for they be changeful and timid as the wild creatures in whose skins they clothe themselves."

"Faith—" Thorne smiled ruefully—"they appear to be Christians in one respect. They hang their foes to the yard arm as readily as any ship master."

Joan shook her head.

"'Tis their way of burial. They leave their dead fastened to the branches of trees, fully clad, with weapons bound to them. So they made shift to do with the thieves of the pinnace, before they towed the vessel out and set her adrift."

Through Thorne's brain passed the thought that this was not the method of burial Peter would prefer. It was clear to him that Peter and himself stood near to the edge of a grave, of whatever nature it might prove to be. Yet his curiosity was all for the maiden and the fate in store for her.

"What plan have you, child?" he asked. "How will you contrive to leave the Ice Sea and return to your home?"

She seemed surprized that he took thought of her.

"Why—the skiff may put in at the Wardhouse before the ice floes gird us in."

But she added, less cheerfully—

"I have no kindred awaiting me."

The armiger was not minded to dally over the situation.

"Who is the chief of these folk? Have him in, and let him speak his mind. If it is his intention to compass my death, I will e'en take him with me to the nether world." Placing his back against the fireplace he waited until the girl, after a moment's hesitation called softly.

"*Tuon, hulde na.*"

And after a moment there appeared in the doorway the same Lap who had rowed out to the *Edward*. Tuon's stocky shoulders were covered by a wolf skin, and the empty muzzle of the beast leered at them over the broad, greased-coated muzzle of the savage whose yellow, pointed teeth resembled greatly the fangs of the wolf.

Even his hands were covered with fur mittens, and Thorne reflected that these Laps must have been the beasts that Peter glimpsed on the lookout height. He suspected that beside the warmth of the furs, they availed themselves of these strange garments to hunt down other animals, remembering the Lap that, dressed in a deer's skin and antlers, he had taken for a stag the day before.

Tuon walked forward warily, peering about him as if entering a cage.

"Put down your weapons, sir."

Joan pointed at Thorne's pistol and sword.

"Nay, I'll yield me to no savage. Let him take the weapons, an he will."

Tuon sidled closer, several of his companions following him into the hall. Thorne was aware of a strong animal scent, of foul flesh and sweating hair. His gorge rose and he clapped hand to the hilt of his sword, having no mind to be made prisoner by such as they. Joan's dark eyes widened in alarm, and Tuon, sensing the rising excitement of the Christians, became uneasy.

At this instant Peter awoke. He sat up, stared at the strange beings who were moving toward Thorne in the vague light of the hall, saw the slender girl in the sea cloak, the fire ruddy on her tawny hair, peered at Thorne who stood as if turned to stone.

Springing up, he drew a blanket over his head and rushed toward Joan Andrews before Thorne could speak. Arriving, as he judged, before her, his eyes being swathed in the cloth, he fell on his knees.

"A' ——'s mercy, if thou be'st troll or Ellequeen, spare an honest shipman. Thou'st put my mate under a spell, so that he speaks not nor moves an eye. Have mercy on a sorry wight that never harmed hair of thy head."

The spectacle of the giant seaman muffled in a blanket aroused the interest of the Laps. It was clear to them that he intended no violence to the maiden they had taken into their protection; in fact, they must have suspected that he was performing some ritual.

No arrow was loosed at him, and when he withdrew the blanket cautiously he found Thorne smiling at him broadly, and Joan Andrews broke into a rippling laugh at sight of his red and foolish countenance.

Laughter is a key that unlocks many a

black mood. The Laps had mirth in them, and Tuon grinned fearsomely. And this served to change Peter's mood in a twinkling. He cast down his blanket with an oath and spread his stocky legs, clasping his great fists.

"So ye would bait Peter Palmer? Put up your fibbers and I'll best the lot of ye scurvy dogs."

"Let be!" cried Thorne. "Here is no troll maiden, but a child out of the Scot's land."

IN SPITE of this assurance Peter regarded Joan Andrews with misgivings while the others strove to talk with Tuon; and to the end of his time on the island gave her a wide berth. He never forgot that she had influence over the Laps, and by a process of reasoning all his own, was convinced that she must be a troll maiden out of the sea in human form.

Meanwhile Joan made a bargain with Tuon. The Laps were to have possession of the trade goods, all Thorne's stores and weapons except his sword. She was to be allowed to live in the tower, and the two Englishmen in the hall, and they were not to be harmed.

Thorne was not pleased, for it amounted to a surrender, but the girl pointed out that he was giving no more than the Laps would take in any case, and, besides, his only follower had assuredly yielded himself without any terms at all to her mercy.

"This island is theirs," she added practically. "'Tis true the Wardhouse was built by other hands long dead—perhaps by the Norsemen. But Tuon's men hold that it is theirs. They ask why you have come hither, if not to plunder or avenge the death of the pirates."

So Thorne explained the voyage and its purpose, and she shook her head gravely.

"I fear me for your comrades. There lies no passage to the eastward. My father often said that it is closed with ice, that never opens. So the Easterlings told him."

For a space Thorne thought that this might bring about Chancellor's return, until he recalled the stubborn courage of the pilot-major and his settled determination to find new lands. There might be no northeast passage to Cathay, but Chancellor would press on as long as strength remained to him and his men.

CHAPTER XII

SNOW

THE days passed, and Thorne went more often to the lookout because it irked him to sit in the Wardhouse where he felt that the very food he shared was taken from her bounty.

Moreover she had warned him earnestly not to venture abroad without her, and this went sorely against his pride. And there came a day when the hoar frost was white on the ground. Snow fell that night, driving the Easterlings into the Wardhouse. Their hunger sharpened by the bitter wind, the savages fell upon Thorne's store of victuals. Only half warming the meat and fish at the fire, they gorged until their bodies swelled.

Thorne went out to the hill as soon as the snow ceased, after cautioning Peter against quarreling with Tuon and his men.

The aspect of the island was changed; the sun was invisible behind clouds and the gray light seemed to arise from the white ground under his feet. In spite of the brisk walk he was shivering when he reached the rocky height and searched the sea with his eyes.

No sail was to be seen and, peering to the eastward, he saw ice floes in the course taken by the *Edward*. This made it certain that Chancellor would not return to the islands until next season.

No animals were astir, and Thorne, who was not given to imagination, could not rid himself of the belief that invisible and malignant forces were closing in upon the island; elementals, his father had termed them.

Thrusting his numbed hands into his belt, he was setting himself to consider means by which they could live through the winter, when a clear voice hailed him cheerily.

"Ho, Master Thorne, you have disobeyed orders again. I' faith, you have led me a merry chase!"

The girl was climbing swiftly to the lookout, clad in a new manner, her small feet snug in deerskin boots, her slim body wrapped in a fox-fur tunic and a felt hood drawn over her head. It was the first time he had seen a woman without a skirt that came clear to the ground, but Joan Andrews was careless of her unwonted dress.

"Why, the lad is in a pet." She glanced searchingly at his drawn face. "The frost will harden in you, if you go not abroad in warmer garments than those. La, sir, such things may do well enough in London town, but not upon the Ice Sea. I will beg furs of good Tuon and sew ye a proper mantle."

"You need not, and—I am not angry, child."

"Child, quoth'a! You are a large lout for your age, Master Thorne, but you are not old enough to call me child. Nay, I think you very young."

So saying she beckoned him to a spot where the wind was warded by a great rock and, when he came reluctantly, sat close to afford him the warmth of her furs.

"Peter says that you were a gentleman at court. Is it true?"

Thorne found the girl difficult to understand; her gaze, as searching and guileless as a child was more disconcerting than the eyes, the bright and calculating eyes, of the ladies in waiting, for whom he had had a boyish awe.

"I can break me a lance in the tournaments, and keep the saddle of a horse," he admitted. "I can train a goshawk for hare or wild fowl."

"What else?"

"I have killed several in fair fight with sword and dagger."

"Any lout can do as much, if luck be with him. What else?"

"Why, I can put a shaft from a crossbow through the ribs of a running hart at a hundred paces."

Mistress Joan smiled behind the fur collar of her jacket. She had seen Thorne fail to do just that not so long ago, but she did not remind him of it. Instead her mood changed swiftly.

"Now, sirrah, tell me this: Was it courteous in you to run off and leave me beleaguered by the drunken Easterlings? They are near mad, with the spirits they have taken."

"Are they so?"

Thorne frowned, thinking too late of the brandy and beer. Tuon and his men had seemed little inclined to try these strange drinks, but now apparently they had done so, and the result was not pleasant to contemplate.

The fault being his, he was loath to admit it.

"I knew it not, Mistress Joan. 'Swounds, I grew weary of your following. A man may not think aright with a vixen's tongue going like a bell clapper at his ear."

The corners of her lips drew down, and she moved a little farther away.

"So my father used to say, when things went ill. Nay, Master Thorne, I followed you because I feared for—" she hesitated with an upward glance that judged his mood shrewdly—"I feared to be left by myself in the company of the Easterlings, and—and I am lonely, by times."

"In that case," assented young Master Thorne gravely, "you may walk with me as often as you are minded, aye and talk also."

Around the corner of the rock Peter, the boatswain, hove in sight, his head bent against the wind.

"Stand by, Master Ralph," he muttered hoarsely, "stand by to go about. Luck sets our way."

THORNE motioned to the shipman to join them, saying that they owed their lives to Mistress Joan and it would be ill repayment of her courtesy to talk apart.

At this Peter pursed his lips and was heard to growl that there was no knowing whether the maid was friend or unfriend, and for his part he would liefer keep his distance from one who ran about with Easterlings and dressed like a lad—a mortal sin to his thinking.

"The beer is gone," he vouchsafed darkly, "ah, and the brandy. 'Twill be a dry winter for us."

"Gone?" cried Joan Andrews. "Then the Laps have guzzled it."

"As ever was. They drained the casks and now lie about the house like fish out o' water. Fuddled!"

He winked at Thorne and contorted his face in the effort to convey some hidden meaning unperceived by the girl.

"Scuppers awash! They screamed and danced and fit among themselves. You could stow them in the fire and they would not stir—all *twenty* of them."

And he touched his dirk on the side away from Joan, beckoning with his head to his companion.

"Stir a leg, Master Ralph. Blast my eyes but here's luck a-playing our game, and——"

He lifted a huge hand to his lips and mouthed in Thorne's ears.

"Has the wench put a spell on ye? We can be masters in this island before the sand runs from the glass again."

Thorne looked at him silently. He and Joan had not been gone from the house an hour and in that time twenty savages had downed two half barrels of brandy and beer. They were not accustomed to such liquor, and he wondered whether they would ever stand upon their feet again. Here, as Peter said, was a chance to make sure they would not. And yet he had made a truce with these same savages.

"Mistress Joan," he observed, "the boatswain here has a mind to rid us of the Easterlings while they lie befuddled. What say you? Are you for us, or for them!"

The girl lifted her head impatiently.

"You are both fools—faith, I know not which is the greater. Peter, have not the Laps eaten up the main part of your victuals?"

"Aye, mistress—" Peter was civil enough to Joan's face—"that they have. And they have e'en drunk up my beer."

"Now if you kill them, how are we three to get us food to live through the winter?"

Peter started to reply, and scratched his head.

"How will we live in any case?"

"With bows and snares and nets that they make these savages will get us small game and fish. If you had slain them you would starve before another seventh day."

To this Peter had no answer, but waxed surly for being reproved in his folly.

He had hastened to Thorne after watching from the tower stairs until the Laps were past heeding his doings, and he had expected that the armiger would fall in at once with his plan. Now he stared at his young companion distrustfully.

Thorne's mind seemed to be elsewhere. His eyes narrowed and his lips close drawn, he was staring at a wrack of clouds out to windward. Peter shook his head moodily, marking the high color in the lad's cheeks, the splendid poise of the curly head.

Aye, the boy was rarely favored, being more than handsome, and this was why the maiden, who must be a sea troll in human form, had laid her spell on him. She wanted to have him for her own.

Belike, thought Peter, she would suck the life from Master Ralph or else beguile him into the waters and swim down to the sea's bottom, she who had taken a dead man's name, who sat each day in the evening hour by a grave, who had a man's wisdom and a witch's craft.

"Peter," said Thorne, and his words came in an altered voice, so that the girl glanced at him fleetingly, "this is what we will do. Fetch me my arbalest from the Wardhouse, with pistols for yourself. Look yonder!"

The boatswain knitted shaggy brows and presently made out what the armiger had been looking at. A boat was heading into the harbor. He sprang to his feet to shout joyfully, when he paused uneasily. This was no full rigged ship, but a longboat that tossed on the swell, moving sluggishly under a lug sail.

"'Tis the sailing skiff that Tuon sent for," cried Joan.

"It will be ours before Tuon is on his feet again," said Thorne.

THE lugger—if the long, ramshackle skiff could be called that—staggered slowly through the cross currents at the mouth of the cove and was coaxed to the shore, where three men sprang out, to tug it up on the sand. A fourth Easterling, who seemed to stand no higher than Joan's chin, loosened the sheets and left the leather sail to flap as it would.

Then, without more ado, they started up the path to the Wardhouse and were confronted by Thorne and Peter with the cross bow ready wound and a brace of loaded pistols.

"Avast, my bullies!" roared the shipman. "Bring to and show your colors, or swallow lead the wrong way."

And he brandished a long pistol, motioning with the other hand for them to remain where they were. His aspect and voice had a startling effect on the savages; three of them dropped the light spears they carried and raced away; the fourth, the smallest of the lot fell to his knees behind a hummock of grass.

Before Peter could sight his pistol, the little Easterling had strung his bow and loosed an arrow that flicked past Thorne's throat. The amiger pulled the trigger of his arbalest, but the bolt flew high, so closely did the miniature warrior hug the earth.

"Hull him, shipmate!" bellowed Peter. "Down between wind and wat—*ugh*!"

A second arrow from the native's bow struck Peter fairly under the ribs with a resounding thud, driving the breath from his lungs. Instead of penetrating, the missile hung loosely from his stout leather jerkin. Peter, being suspicious of the Easterlings, had prudently donned a steel corselet under his jerkin and mantle.

Pulling out the arrow, he tossed it away, and was sighting anew with the pistol when Thorne cried to him to hold hard. The Easterling champion had stood up, in round-eyed amazement, and was drawing near them, fascinated by the sight of men who were invulnerable to his shafts. As a sign of submission he unstrung his bow, and laid it at Thorne's feet, with a curious glance at the cumbersome crossbow.

Unlike the other Easterlings he wore tunic and trousers of gray squirrel skins, neatly sewed together with gut and ornamented at knees and neck with squirrel tails.

Joan Andrews, coming up, called him Kyrger, and said that he was a Samoyed tribesman, a young hunter who brought very good pelts to her father at times. The sight of the girl seemed to reassure Kyrger, who made no effort to escape; instead he took to following Thorne around.

Peter rolled off to inspect the lugger, and returned with mingled hope and disgust written upon his broad countenance, to report that she smelled like a Portugal's bilge, and was open from tiller to prow, some buff being stretched across the gunwales at either end. She seemed stout enough, he added.

But Joan, who had been questioning the hunter, cried out that Kyrger had sighted two ships several days before the lugger put off from the coast. The Samoyed had followed the vessels for a while, never having seen ships of such size in his life.

"That would be the *Esperanza* and the *Confidentia*, Sir Hugh's vessels," observed Thorne. "Ask him where they were sighted."

Kyrger pointed to the eastward.

"How were they headed?"

The Samoyed indicated the same direction, and Thorne was puzzled. Sir Hugh had not put in to the Wardhouse but had gone on, apparently three or four days after Chancellor. The three vessels might be expected to join company again. At all events, Sir Hugh would not come to the Wardhouse now. But why had he not appeared at the rendezvous?

"Ask him if he has ever been far along the coast to the east," he said at length.

Kyrger held up all the fingers of both hands, and nodded his head emphatically.

"He means either ten days travel or ten kills of game," Joan explained. "It might be a hundred leagues."

"In ten days?" broke in Peter, who scented deceit. "'Tis not to be believed."

"They ride behind reindeer when the snow is on the ground," Joan assured him. "They go very swiftly. And Kyrger says what I have told you, my masters. The ice hath closed the sea a hundred leagues from here."

Thorne considered this, and saw that there was no reason why they should remain on the island. He could be of more assistance to Chancellor by seeking him out; besides, he now had the maid on his hands, and had found in Kyrger a guide who might be invaluable to the voyagers.

"Then will we follow the ships," he said slowly, "and, in God's mercy, may come up with them. And you, Mistress Joan, will come with me to the fellowship of Christians again."

HE WATCHED the Samoyed and believed that the Easterling had no ill feeling toward them. What went on in the mind of the little hunter was a mystery; but it was certain that the man had attached himself to them.

Kyrger assented to their plan without comment. He seemed more interested in Thorne's crossbow which he was allowed to examine while Peter returned to the Wardhouse for a sack of biscuits and cheese and their few personal belongings, the girl accompanying him, to bid the grave inside the palisade a last farewell.

Seeing that Kyrger had not been slain, the other Samoyeds put in appearance and squatted down a bowshot away, and were induced to go to the lugger when the others returned, Peter lamenting the fact that Andrews' trade goods must be left behind. There was no room in the boat for the bales, and the seven of them.

The wind was favorable, and in a few hours the island group was lost to sight, Peter guiding the lugger toward the shore that soon loomed over their heads. They coasted for a while until Kyrger called out that his camp lay inland from where they were.

By nightfall they were sitting around a fire, in a clump of firs, thawing out their chilled limbs while the hunter roasted wild fowl on a spit over the flames, and the two Samoyeds crouched at the edge of the circle of light, watching the actions of the white-skinned strangers, afraid to come nearer.

Afterward, Joan slept soundly in Kyrger's diminutive tent of heavy felt stretched over a frame of small birch poles, while Thorne and Peter took turn at mounting guard by the fire, both in good spirits at being again upon the mainland. The hours passed, and the light did not grow stronger.

Instead, the surface of the snow, broken by the dark patches of bare earth under the trees, seemed to glow with a radiance of its own. Not a breath of air stirred; the tips of the firs hung lifeless. It was as if a curtain had been drawn over the sun.

Joan awakened, and they prepared food in silence, and before they had done Thorne uttered an exclamation, pointing out to sea. During the night, the Samoyeds, aroused by something unperceived by the Englishmen, had gone down to the shore and launched the lugger. Now it could be seen half way out to the blur of the islands, tossing on a restless swell.

Clearly there was wind out there and overhead a shrill whining was to be heard from a vast height. Peter cocked his head and listened attentively, becoming more and more uneasy without being able to put his foreboding in words; but Kyrger who had come up with a pair of reindeer, cast one glance at the white-capped swell, and fell to work taking down the tent.

He threw away the birch frame and cut heavy stakes from the pile of firewood. These he drove into the ground in a circle about the edge of the felt, which he clewed down, using twisted strands of hemp.

"Aye, aye shipmate," cried Peter, bearing a hand at the task as soon as he saw what the hunter wanted done. "Here's all taut and snug. But what's the lay?"

Working swiftly and moving about silently in his fur footsacks, Kyrger pounded in all the stakes but two until, save at that one point, his circular felt was tamped down to the ground.

Then, with broad leather thongs, he bound up his supply of dried meat, with the belongings of his companions, and lashed the bundle fast in the crotch of a big fir. The bag of biscuit and cheese he thrust under the felt.

"'Tis little he will suffer us to take with us when we set out," grumbled the boatswain.

"Nay, I think he intends to bide here," said Thorne. "Look at the harts."

The reindeer were behaving strangely. They were short-legged gray beasts with heavy hair and longer antlers than the men had ever seen before. As soon as Kyrger had turned them loose they had gone to a hollow between the trees and stretched out on the ground, their muzzles pointing toward the sea.

The hunter trotted past Thorne, his arms filled with moss that he had grubbed up from bare patches of earth. This moss he piled under the nostrils of the beasts. He ran off and reappeared with three fur robes, one having a buff lining. This he gave to Peter, sharing one of the others with Thorne.

His own he wrapped around him quickly, covering his head completely, and, walking to the hollow where the reindeer lay, stretched himself at full length close to one of the beasts. Springing up and throwing off his robe, he motioned to Peter to follow his example.

"Kyrger says," Joan explained, "that we must wrap our heads in the coverings and lie down with our heads toward the sea. A *khylden* is coming out of the Ice Sea."

"What is that?" Thorne asked.

"A snow driver. I do not know what it is. Kyrger says we must do as his reindeer." The hunter spoke to her again, and she added. "You and I are to creep under the felt—'twill not hold Peter's bulk."

"A snow driver? Faith, man or beast or elemental, let it come," growled Peter. "Who fears a starm on the mainland? I'll not lie battened under hatches."

He went back to the fire and sat down, while Thorne went to see if the skiff was still visible. By now it must have reached the harbor at the Wardhouse, and before long Tuon and his men would be returning, he reflected.

BUT Tuon and his men did not come that day. The sky overhead darkened to a black pall; only along the edges of the horizon a half light played, like fen fires or phosphorescence at sea. The shrill and invisible voice in the heights deepened to a howl that was almost human, punctuated by the roaring of the surf.

Thorne noticed that the trees of the grove were moving unsteadily; he heard a human voice calling him plaintively, and at once the sound was snatched away by a mighty droning in the air. The ranks of firs bent back and quivered, as a ship heels over before a sudden blast and labors in righting herself.

And then he felt for the first time the breath of the Ice Sea, the touch of the snow driver.

In that instant cold struck through him as if he had been utterly naked. He was driven from the knoll on which he stood, and pushed toward the camp. Without volition of his own he began to run, and heard his name called. He turned toward the sound, and saw Kyrger kneeling at the edge of the felt, beckoning him.

Thorne crawled under the covering, and found that his fur robe had been pushed in ahead of him. Joan was there beside him, invisible in the darkness, her man's sea-cloak drawn over her.

"Roll up in your coverall," she cautioned him. "Kyrger says that we must keep warm, else we never shall be warm again."

He both heard and felt the Samoyed driving home the two stakes that had been left loose. He was lying on a dry bed of pine needles, and even as he wriggled into his furs he was conscious that these were being driven against his face with something that stung his skin like tiny specks of hot iron.

Covering his head, he lay still a while until the chill had left him, listening to the whining of the wind that came in great gusts, wondering how Peter and Kyrger were faring.

At length, being minded to find out, he crept from his furs and pushed up the flap of the tent enough to thrust his head and shoulders out. And he almost cried aloud in astonishment. Snow, a fine, dry snow, was whirling about him, driving into eyes and ears, and making it difficult to breathe. This was not like the snow storms that he had known, where flakes fell heavily into a moist mass underfoot.

This was the breath of the snow driver, tinged with the cold of outer space, more malignant and pitiless than human enemies. Thorne knew now the meaning of *khylden*, knew too that it would be utterly useless for him to try to stir outside their covering.

He crept back, shivering, and felt the girl draw nearer him for warmth.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GATE IN THE SKY

FOR nearly three days the snow driver raged, and then there fell a calm. The whole of the earth was blanketed in white and only the dense clump of firs showed the spot where four human beings slept, two feet beneath the surface of the snow.

The reindeer were the first to sense the passing of the storm, and staggered up, tossing their heads and going off at once to paw at the drifts with their cleft hoofs in search of the moss that was their winter food. The movement aroused Kyrger, who bobbed up and shook himself like a dog. Picking up a fallen branch, he went to where Joan and Thorne were buried, feeling around with his feet until he found the spot.

Here he hesitated a moment, his eyes traveling to the bundle of gear secured in the tree. This was to him incalculable treasure, and, above the other things he coveted the crossbow which sent a shaft twice as far as his bow.

It came into his mind that if he let the outlanders sleep on they would die and the weapon would be his as well as the other things. In fact he wondered whether the other three were not dead already.

Then the Samoyed began to thrust the snow away with his branch. The same instinct that had led him to safeguard the lives of the helpless three, now called to him to rouse them. Kyrger had accepted Thorne as his master. He looked upon the armiger as a young lord, in much the same way that Thorne cherished the memory of Edward, his king.

He hauled up the felt and satisfied himself that Thorne still breathed; about the maiden he was more doubtful. He examined the biscuits, and saw that they had eaten something. Then he set to work rubbing snow on the man's face and hands until the blue tinge faded from the skin and Thorne opened his eyes, grimacing with pain, and incapable of movement until the hunter had rubbed his limbs.

"Mistress Joan?" he croaked, and rose to his knees, swaying dizzily as the blood began to circulate through his veins again.

He drew back the hood from the girl's face and felt for the pulse in her throat. He could feel nothing through the numbness of his fingers.

"Fire," he muttered. "We must have a fire."

Helped by Kyrger, he plowed his way to the bundle in the tree and took from it a powder horn and steel and flint. Then, cutting off a length of the Samoyed's loosely woven rope, he untwisted the hemp strands. Gathering a double handful of dead twigs from the firs, he went back to the spot kept clear of snow by the felt and his own body.

Building a small mound of twigs and pine needles, he poured a little powder from the horn and fell to striking the steel against the flint stone. Presently a spark flew into the powder grains and flared up, eating into the dead twigs and the hemp strands.

Kyrger, who had watched with interest, now brought larger twigs and coaxed the tiny flame into a crackling blaze. To this branches were added until the fire glowed warmly. The heat only served to quicken the girl's heavy breathing, until Thorne chafed her wrists and throat with snow.

After a while her eyes flickered, and she sighed. A kind of smile touched her lips, bringing the semblance of life back into her again. He himself ached in every joint and his vision played queer tricks. He fancied that the whole sky over the sea was on fire.

Kyrger had anticipated his need, and brought frozen meat, which he placed on flat rocks in the fire. A savory odor spread into the air, and, as if roused by this summons, Peter Palmer dragged himself out of his white mausoleum and crouched down by the fire.

Thorne noticed with weary surprize that the stout boatswain was weeping. Tears trickled down his hollow cheeks, but he said no word. He kept his eyes fixed on the meat until Thorne had forced a piece between the girl's teeth and induced her to chew and swallow it.

When Joan would eat no more the three men fell on the meat and divided what remained between them. Then Peter tightened his belt and looked around him slowly.

"I said truth," he grunted at length. "This maiden was a sea troll; the land is not her place. By black arts she hath fetched us to the very portal of —— which is plainly to be seen over yonder."

Thorne looked over his shoulder and rubbed his eyes. What he had taken for a fantasy was still visible.

A light cloud arched over the northern horizon and from this cloud fiery streamers stretched to the zenith. Up and down these streamers passed a radiance, now purple, now yellow, but always flickering up to an immense height where it vanished in a kind of mist.

As Thorne watched, the radiance vanished, to reappear almost instantly in a different form. Gigantic, glowing pillars seemed now to rise from the dark horizon to the regions of outer space. This glow palpitated and grew stronger until his eyes ached. The pillars were columns of fire, towering over their heads, but giving out no heat.

Then the fiery portals, that had so wrought upon Peter's fancy, vanished and the elusive streamers sprang into being again.

"I have sailed the seas of the earth," said the shipman solemnly, "and I have seen the water rise up into pillars that reached to the sky. I've clapped my deadlights on the serpent that the Good Book names Leviathan, daddle me else. I've seen fishes fly through the air, off Madagascar, it were. But yonder gate in the sky is the gate of Satan's do-minions."

Having relieved his mind of this augury, he fell into a troubled sleep. Somewhere in the lurid darkness a tree trunk cracked sharply, and Thorne heard far inland the howling of a wolf pack, coursing the hard snow on the heels of the storm. Hunched close to the fire that warmed them into life, he wondered what the morrow might bring.

THE armiger admitted to Joan that they must have heavier garments, if they were to enter the unknown world to the east. The girl labored with Kyrger in sewing rude coats out of the furs for the two men to wear. For thread she had the supple gut preserved by the Samoyed, and for needle a bit of whalebone rubbed into the desired shape.

Meanwhile Kyrger got out what appeared to be a pair of great wooden skates, nearly two ells long and as wide as the palm of his hand, with strips of reindeer skin fixed to the under side.

Thus shod and carrying a long staff, he could glide over the surface of the snow beside the sled on which the girl rode. Thorne and Peter ran or walked in the hard track made by the cloven hoofs of the beasts and the run of the sled.

It was necessary to carry on the sled powder, tinder and pine branches enough to kindle a fire at a moment's notice. Only in this way could they ward off the attacks of the lean, gray wolves, larger than any the voyagers had seen before.

It was after they had beaten off a pack of these wolves and were pushing forward warily, that Thorne halted and pointed down at some large tracks that ran across the slot of the sled.

"I pray you, Mistress Joan," he said, "tell the Samoyed we must have good fresh meat, ere ever we can reach the ships. Here are bear's tracks, and we will hunt down the beast."

But when the maiden translated his speech to Kyrger, the Easterling shook his head and uttered one word decisively.

"Kyrger says," she explained, "that this is *ermecin*—the strongest. 'Tis thus they name the white bear of the Ice Sea."

"Nevertheless we will seek it out."

The small Samoyed appeared to be troubled. *Ermecin*, he declared, could not be brought down by his arrows. Nor would the pistols of the outlanders serve to stop the rush of this beast. Moreover the white bear was sacred to a neighboring tribe, the Ostiaks.

Thorne was determined to get good meat for the girl, and took his crossbow from the sled, winding it with care and setting a bolt in the slot. Joan insisted on going with him, saying that she had a dread of being left alone. Peter was put in charge of the reindeer and the three set out toward the shore.

The tracks were fresh, and Kyrger followed them easily, though reluctantly enough. They descended a gully and came out on the shore, sighting the bear before long, among a nest of rocks.

It scented or saw them at the same time and raised its head on a swaying, sinuous neck. Thorne saw that its head was small and its body greater than that of any bear he had set eyes upon. Moreover, being white tinged with yellow, it blended with the snow behind it.

It did not seem to fear them because it made no effort to move away when they approached within bowshot.

"Bid Kyrger loose his shafts," said Thorne briefly. "For he can shoot several, and I but one."

The Samoyed shook his head, reluctantly, yet obediently fitted an arrow to the string and bent his short bow. The missile whipped through the air and struck the white bear in the flank, but did not penetrate half its length. The brute swung toward them instantly, its head weaving from side to side.

A second arrow pierced its shoulder, and it swept through the snow, moving with unexpected speed, so that Kyrger's third shot merely glanced along its ribs.

The hunter cast down his bow and drew his knife, the breath hissing between his teeth, while Thorne planted his feet and sighted the crossbow, sending a bolt into the bear's throat.

The beast plunged forward, and gained its feet slowly, blood streaming from its open jaws. Then it fell on its side, not a dozen paces from them.

Kyrger shouted, wild with excitement. He pointed admiringly at Thorne's weapon and ran to the bear, chanting something loudly. To Thorne's surprize Joan smiled, although her lips were bloodless. She had not stirred or spoken during the charge of the great beast.

"He is saying," she laughed, "that the spirit of the bear must not be angered at us. He is telling the spirit that we did not slay it, nay, a wicked Ostiak sped the bolt. And when the bear's spirit seeks blood revenge in another body it must follow the tribe of Ostiaks."

"What are they?"

"My father said they dwell more to the east. They are cruel people, who slay strangers. They are the dog-sled people, more warlike than the reindeer-sled Samoyeds."

Leaving Kyrger to skin the animal, they returned to the camp, where Peter had kindled a fire and Thorne took the shipman aside.

"Many days have passed since we bade Master Chancellor farewell. By my reckoning this should be close to Christmas, if, indeed it is not that very day."

"Noël!"

Peter glanced up at the flickering arc of the northern lights, and at the gray sweep of the shore with its fringe of ice floes.

"That is ill said, younker, for it puts me in mind of the honest Yule log, aye, and the boar's head, and a pudding with brandy afire. And here us be on Christmas eve, where the very angels would fear to raise a chant, and the good Christ——"

"He would not fear to venture here."

Thorne wrinkled his brows in thought.

Peter regarded his companion in some surprize, for he had not noticed that Thorne was given to prayer or meditation.

"'Tis of Mistress Joan I am thinking," went on the armiger. "Her spirit lags, and if we do not show her some care she will not endure in this life. Now, she is ever mindful of prayer and such-like. How if we hold the Yuletide as best we may?"

"Aye, but how?"

"Why, we can cut us a proper tree and make shift to trim it. Then may we sing a round of carols."

Peter rubbed his chin, and eyed his friend sidewise.

"Fairly said, if we had e'en a nuggin of brandy or a sprig of hollywood. But carols—harumpf! Do you sing the words, Master Ralph, and I'll carry the melody, blast me else! A fine voice have I for melody, but as for words—now that's a craft of another rig."

NEVERTHELESS, he got his hatchet from the sled and disappeared into the twilight, while Thorne aided Kyrger in preparing the steaks the Samoyed had brought up with the bear skin.

By the time the meal was ready, and Joan seated on the sled, he returned, carrying a small fir which he set erect in the snow a little distance from the fire and proceeded, with an air of mysterious importance, to set icicles in the branches.

Then he placed the last of the biscuits in Kyrger's solitary pewter dish and drew from his girdle a small leather flask.

"I filled it at the Wardhouse," he said defensively when he caught Thorne's eye on him. "Aye, 'twas cherished 'gainst sore need. 'Tis the last bilge of the brandy."

With that he took a splinter of wood from the fire and touched the pewter plate with flame. Blue fire sprang up about the biscuits, and Kyrger who had been watching with growing interest, hid his face in his arm.

It was obvious to the Samoyed that these outlanders were making *shaman* magic, a magic that involved the cutting of a pine tree and burning what appeared to be water on a common pewter plate.

Peter raised the dish on high and his dumpy face split into a grin.

"Fair greeting to ye Mistress Joan. My service to ye, lady, on this eve of evenings, this merry Yuletide."

"Is it truly so?" The dark eyes of the maiden grew somber. "Nay, you have taken all our biscuits, and burnt up your brandy."

"No matter." Peter waved a huge hand grandly. "I know where more is to be had. Aye, we will have no more troubles to ward. Now—" he laid the burning dish at her feet and cleared his throat—"a bit of chantry, to ease this down the ways:

"The boar's head in hand bring I,
With garlands gay and rosemary;
I pray you all sing merrily——

"To be sure," he broke off apologetically, "we do lack summat of a boar's head, and garlands. We must e'en make shift without the rosemary, but Master Ralph and I will pipe up a song, having, as it were, a pretty face—a fair, sweet face, I say—whereby to lay our course."

He puffed out his cheeks and made his bow, and Thorne, who had been no little surprized at his high spirits and hearty manner, saw that the girl had smiled. So he went to stand by the fire and lifted his fine voice against the leaden silence of the night.

"Forth they went and glad they were;
Going, they did sing,
With mirth and solace they made good cheer,
For joy of that new tiding."

His voice, which had been hoarse, now rang out clearly:

"Neither in halls, nor yet in bowers,
Born would He not be,
Neither in castles, nor yet in towers
That seemly were to see;
But at His Father's will,
Betwixt an ox and an ass,
Jesu this king born He was;
Heaven he bring us till!"

Peter nodded approval beating time with a finger as if he was a criterion of good music. His rasping roar joined in the chorus, while he kept an eye on the maiden:

"Forth they went and glad they were;
Going, they did sing—
Noël!"

"And now," quoth the shipman, "God lack, the maid is weeping. She is a-leak at the eyes."

So, in truth, Joan was crying, her hands pressed to her cheeks. The two men surveyed her doubtfully, rather taken aback at the result of their holiday spirit. Peter made bold to lay his hand on her shoulder.

"What cheer, mistress? Sets the wind foul or fair?"

She glanced up, her face flushed and a smile twitching her lips.

"Nay, I am a simpleton, good Peter. The ballad minded me of Christmas Eve long since when we had candles in the casements of the cottages of Cairness, and the children sang sweet carols. Nay, my tears were not —not of grief. I do give you thanks for your entertainment, good Peter."

The boatswain drew back as if satisfied and motioned Thorne to one side.

"Does 'ee love the lass, Master Ralph?"

"Why not? Certainly, she is a fair companion and a brave soul."

"Ah." Peter nodded sagely. "Y'are a dullard with words, but still, with an observant eye. In a manner o' speaking, ye keep a sharp lookout, Master Ralph. But not so sharp as Peter Palmer," and he made mysterious motions with brows and lips. "I have good tidings for ye, younker. The maid is an honest maid, and no sea troll."

Thorne laughed.

"And why, Peter?"

"By reason of the holy words of the Christian song. When it was sung, she did not vanish, she did not slip cable and leave us. If she had been a witch, now, or a troll, she would not be here. So I say, if ye love the lass, why cherish her and ye will have no harm by it."

"I am indebted to your wisdom, Peter, and to your—ob-servant eye."

"Y'are so," assented the shipman. "For I was about to tell the lass my tidings. While I was on yonder headland seeking the Yule fir I saw the ships. Aye, Sir Hugh's ship and the *Confidentia,* lying in the ice of a bay. Come morrow, we'll be with our mates."

Kyrger squatting by the fire, waited solemnly for the end of this ritual of the outlanders. He wondered if they had been paying reverence to the *quoren vairgin,* the Reindeer Spirit.

Perhaps, he thought, like himself they had been paying their respects to the elder souls, the spirits of their dead companions, which were quite visible in the sky.

Purple and fiery red, these elder souls flamed on the broad gate of the sky. Kyrger knew well that the northern lights were the souls of the dead, rushing from earth to the zenith in their wild, merry dance.

Never had he seen the gate in the sky so broad, the flames so bright.

CHAPTER XIV

THORNE MEETS SIR HUGH

THE little *Confidentia* lay stranded in a chaos of jutting ice fragments and rocks. A few cables' lengths farther out the admiral-ship rode at anchor, although so girdled with ice that it was wedged fast.

They were in a shallow bay, where the wind, sweeping in from the open sea, had driven ice floes into a solid pack. The shores were treeless.

Under the wind gusts the waist curtains, that had been put up to shelter the crews, shivered, and the long pennant of Sir Hugh's ship whipped around the mast. From the solid ice near the *Confidentia* a trail ran through the snow to disappear over the distant hillocks.

Thorne and Peter shouted joyfully and Kyrger clucked on his reindeer until they entered this trail and reached the shore. Without waiting for a hail or a sight of their shipmates, the two men crossed the frozen surface of the bay, climbing between the rocks, and reached the ship's ladder.

Peter was first under the waistcloth and Thorne found him standing by the bole of the mainmast, staring aft. The helmsman of the *Confidentia* faced them, on his knees, one arm crooked around the tiller. He had a ragged red cap cocked over one ear.

"God's mercy," whispered the boatswain, "look at his skin!"

The seaman's whole face was purple, his lips, drawn back from the teeth, were no longer visible. Peter climbed the poop ladder and bent over the man; then he touched the fellow's arm.

"Stiff as a merlyn-spike," he muttered.

Thorne had gone to the door on the quarter deck and thrust it open, his pulse quickening. For this was Durforth's ship.

In the dim light from the narrow ports the great cabin seemed deserted and he wondered if the officers were on shore.

Presently he stooped down and touched a misshapen form on the deck planking, a human body so bundled up in cloaks and blankets that it was hardly to be recognized. It was bent up in a knot as if gripped by intolerable agony.

With his hand on the man's shoulder he tried to turn him over, and was forced to pull with all his strength. The body did turn over, but the bent legs came up into the air without altering their position.

"That would be Dick Ingram, master's mate," said Peter behind him in a strained voice, "his carcass, poor ——."

Thorne released his hold and the coiled-up body fell over on its side again with a muffled thump.

"Save us!" cried the boatswain, his eyes starting from his head. "I've seen the workings of dropsy and scurvy and such, but here is a black plague. The black death itself hath fallen upon this ship."

"Nay," said Thorne slowly, "these twain are frozen."

"Aye, they are now. But how did they *die?* Let us go for'ard."

They searched the forecastle in vain, and descended from the hold to the galley which was nearly in darkness. But Peter stumbled over another body, and fumbled around on his hands and knees, breathing heavily.

"Here be a mort o' dead men," he grunted. "What cheer, mates, who has a word for Peter Palmer that's come a weary way to have speech with ye? Who is living?"

Their ears strained, they listened for a space, then Peter gave a yell of fear, and, thrusting Thorne aside, sprang up the ladder. On the spar deck he wrenched down the waist curtain, staring out at the *Bona Esperanza*. His broad red face was streaming perspiration, as he cupped his hands and sent a quavering hail over the ice.

"Ahoy, the *Esperanza!* Nick Anthony, where be ye? Ho, Allen! Master Davison —Garge Blage——"

When no response came from the admiral-ship, Peter choked and the blood drained from his face. Wagging his massive head from side to side he began to walk unsteadily toward the ladder.

"Feared I be, Master Ralph. Feared and boding—let be; by all the saints, let me go."

"Then go," assented Thorne, "and bid Kyrger make camp beyond sight of the ships. I will seek out Sir Hugh and his company."

AN HOUR later Thorne stood alone in the roundhouse of the *Bona Esperanza,* his brows knit in thought, his eyes heavy with grief. Alone he was, assuredly, except for the wide-winged gulls that circled over the masts, swerving away when the tip of the pennant flapped. Yet was the *Esperanza* fully manned, the stern cabins occupied. The cook was in his galley, curled up on the cold stove, Sir Hugh seated at his table by the stern casements.

Crew and officers were dead. Cadavers leered at the armiger from deck planks or berths, the eyes standing open as if gazing upon some devastating horror. All the faces were tinged with the same bluish cast. All the bodies were wrapped in odds and ends of garments, tabards and cloaks over all.

Some, apparently, had died while crawling to the lower portions of the ship; others, chiefly the merchant-adventurers, in their berths.

Thorne fought down a rising fear that impelled him to run after Peter and escape from this assemblage of the unspeaking dead. He had seen on the captain-general's table two folded pamphlets and judged that Sir Hugh had written therein. This message must be read.

With an effort, he made his way into the passage and so to the main cabin which was nearly dark, the ports being boarded over. And at once the skin of his head grew cold, a cry trembled in his throat. Before him and below him in the gloom two red eyes were fastened upon him.

He knew that they were eyes because they moved, and he was aware of a faint hissing. Before he could take a grip on himself, or reach for a weapon, the tiny fires glowed brighter. There was a scampering of little feet and something darted past him.

Turning swiftly he saw an ermine, a white creature kin to the weasel, void of fear and relentless as a ferret on the scent of prey.

"What a chucklehead I am," he cried aloud, "to be frighted by a ferret."

But his own voice, ringing hollow in the chill of the pent-in ship did not serve to reassure him. Passing into the presence of the dead leader, he forced himself to take up the papers under the open eyes of tall Sir Hugh.

He saw that both pamphlets were inscribed on the outside. One, marked *The will and testament of Sir Hugh Willoughbie, Knight*, he laid down again.

The other he made out to be a short journal of the voyage. This he pored through slowly, for he was fairly skilled at reading, weighing everything in his mind, as was his habit.

Sir Hugh had been driven far out of his course by the storm that had separated the ships, and had picked up the *Confidentia* when the weather cleared. They put back, but failed to fall in with the Wardhouse.

> We sounded and had 160 fadomes whereby we thought to be farre from land and perceived that the land lay not as the Globe made mention.

For a month they cruised in the Ice Sea, finding the coast barren, and, putting into this haven assailed by

> very evil weather, as frost, snow and hail, as though it had been the dead of winter. We thought it best to winter there. Wherefore we sent out three men Southsouthwest, to search if they could find people, who went three days journey but could find none: after that we sent other three Westward four days journey, which also returned without finding any people. Then sent we three men Southeast three days journey, who in like sort returned without finding of people or any similitude of habitation.

At this point, on the eighteenth day of September, the journal of Sir Hugh Willoughby ended.[*]

Thorne read over the line "the land lay not as the Globe made mention" to be sure that he was not mistaken. No, the words were clear and honest in their meaning.

Why had Durforth, who was in company with Sir Hugh, failed to pick up the Wardhouse? He knew its bearing. Why did the journal end, as it were, in the middle of a day, and that day long before the death of the captain general?

Now Thorne wished that his father, the Cosmographer, could have been at his side to answer these riddles. He was no navigator. But the thought came to him that his father would have gone to Durforth's cabin to look at the globe which had failed Sir Hugh. Durforth must have led the ships away from the Wardhouse to separate them from Chancellor.

Then the agent of Spain had put the ships upon the coast in a desolate region, swept by the winds that came off the pack ice. And, perhaps Sir Hugh had come to suspect Durforth, perhaps the journal had recorded his suspicions after this day in September and Durforth had removed the pages after the death of his commander.

That Durforth was still alive Thorne believed firmly, after he returned to the *Confidentia* and searched the master's cabin. Durforth's body was not to be seen. And, upon the table he found a candle burning, a mass of wax with a wick stuck in it, the whole floating in water in a tin basin. This was the only kind of candle Sir Hugh would permit to be lighted in the cabins, owing to the danger of fire. It might have been burning for two or three days.

And the fresh tracks from the ship to the shore had been made after the last storm. One man, possibly more, had left the ship within the last days. Thorne picked up the candle and looked at the globe. He had some skill at chart reading—having watched many a time the Cosmographer drawing the outlines of the earth—and he knew that this was a complete *mappamundi*. Both hemispheres and the northern and southern seas were traced on the great copper ball very clearly.

And he saw, running due east, from the island of the Wardhouse, a long body of water, a strait that extended to the mark of "Cathay." But the natives said no such passage existed, and the journal of Sir Hugh bore them out.

Durforth's globe was false. It had been drawn to mislead Sir Hugh, even as Renard's agent had been sent to put an end to the voyage. This had been done, and the lives of two hundred men snuffed out like so many candle flames.

THORNE lifted his head, hearing, in the utter silence of the ship, a footfall in the main cabin. It was as light and ellusive as an animal's, yet he was certain that it drew closer to the door by which he was standing.

Drawing his sword and taking the mitten off his right hand, he put out the candle with a sweep of the blade. Waiting until his eyes were accustomed to the gloom, he lifted the latch with his left hand and opened the door with a thrust of his foot.

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[*] No explanation has been reached as to why Sir Hugh's journal ceased rome three months before his death. By the date of the other paper, his will, found by him, it appears that the knight was living in December, 1554. One other fact has escaped the attention of his chroniclers. On the outside of his journal was scribbled a memorandum: "Our shippe being at anker in the harborough called Sterfier in the Island Losoote—" an island on the west coast of Norway, several hundred miles from the Arzina River in Lapland where Sir Hugh and his men perished. Evidently, his globe misled him from the first.

The half light of the outer cabin disclosed Kyrger.

"Ostiaks," murmured the hunter, and glanced expectantly at the white man.

KYRGER was as restless as one of his own reindeer in a pen. When he moved it was as if his feet slipped over thin ice. He kept one eye on the deck beams within inches of his skull. In all his life he had not stood within four walls, certainly never in the maw of a giant's ship such as this. One that went forward *against* the wind.

"Faith, here's a coil," thought the armiger. "I'd best go with him to see what's in the wind."

But Kyrger did not wish this. Motioning for Thorne to watch, he began the pantomime which all primitive races understand. First he impersonated the voyagers, sitting around the fire. Then he jumped up and grasped at his bow, sending an imaginary arrow at an enemy.

By degrees Thorne understood that Ostiak tribesmen had attacked the camp; they had bound Joan and Peter and the reindeer. They had chased Kyrger nearly to the bay.

A very few of the Samoyed's words Thorne had picked up in the last months.

"*Sinym ka-i-unam?*" he asked quickly. "Has the little sister gone to the regions below?"

By shaking his head Kyrger signified that Joan was still alive. So was Peter, thanks to the mail jerkin the shipman wore.

Looking through a crack in one of the boarded-up ports, Thorne saw that the hunter had been telling the truth. On the shore a group of natives were descending toward the ice with two sledges drawn by dogs. Thorne counted eleven of them, armed with long spears and clubs.

He cast a glance aloft. The battle nettings that might have been slung from the quarterdeck rail to the forecastle, to keep out boarders, were not to be seen. Turning into the roundhouse, he looked at the racks where harquebuses and crossbows should have been stacked about the butt of the mizzen. None were there, and he found time to reflect that Durforth must have taken them from the ship.

But his eye fell upon a weapon more potent than any firelock, a murderer. Bolted to a pivot on the quarterdeck rail was one of the light cannon that could be trained at will upon any part of the waist or foredeck. Signing to Kyrger to watch the approaching Ostiaks, he dived below, searching until he found an open keg of powder in the hold.

Dipping up a good quantity in his cap, he climbed the after companion to the roundhouse, which served as the armory. Here he filled a small sack with bullets, nails and scraps of iron. Here, too, he found flint and steel and a slow match.

Back at the gun again he rammed home the loose powder, stuffed in wadding and his shot. Then he primed the touch hole and drew Kyrger back with him to the far angle of the roundhouse where they could not be seen by the natives climbing up the starboard ladder.

It did not take long to strike a spark that ignited the long fuse in his hand. Nursing the slow match he waited, listening to the chattering talk of the Ostiaks and smiling at the sudden silence that fell when the first of them saw the dead helmsman.

Then he walked out to the quarterdeck rail. Nine pairs of small, bleared eyes fastened on him instantly and a spear whirred through the air, striking the chest of his fur jacket. The heavy skin and the leather jerkin under it broke the bone point of the spear, which did no more than shake him.

For a second he looked down into flat, swollen faces, fringed by ragged and greasy hair. About each neck was coiled a string of something whitish, the entrails of deer, he discovered a moment later, which served the Ostiaks for food as well as ornament. Then he trained the gun and touched it off as two more spears flashed by his head.

Kyrger bounded his own height from the deck when the murderer roared. Coughing, as the dense powder fumes swirled back, the Samoyed saw that three of the nine Ostiaks who had come over the rail were stretched on the deck and that two others were limping around in the smoke, yelling with pain.

Never before had Kyrger heard a gun go off, and he was struck with the awfulness of his leader's magic. Perceiving that he himself was without hurt, he plucked up heart and glided to the side bulwark, from which point of vantage he shot one of the natives who had remained on the ice, before they recovered from their astonishment.

Meanwhile Thorne had descended to the

waist, sword in hand. Four of the Ostiaks snarled at him, and rushed through the eddying smoke. They had thrown their spears and wielded knives or clubs, and Thorne ran the first one through the body before they realised the length of his sword.

Then a thin man came forward, armed with the shank-bone of some animal. He wore a woman's leather skirt and his long black hair hung to his shoulders, over a kind of crude armor—so Thorne judged it to be. A multitude of iron images were suspended on cords slung from neck and waist. These images were of dogs and sheep and birds, crudely wrought, but covering his emaciated body completely.

Thorne remembered that this leader of the Ostiaks had been in the very path of the cannon's discharge, but had come through unharmed.

"So you are for your long home, my iron rogue," he gibed, for it was his way to talk when steel was out.

He stepped forward and thrust at the Ostiak's side. But his blade seemed to pass through air, or the loose tunic of the strange man, who screamed at him and struck with the bone club.

Thorne would have been brained if he had not ducked instinctively, the club smashing down on his shoulder blade.

He recovered for a second thrust, but the old native glided away from him, and disappeared under the waist cloth. The armiger sought for him along the rail, but saw him presently running over the ice.

Turning quickly, he was just in time to ward the knife of an Ostiak who had crept up from behind. Slashing at the throat of this newest antagonist, he sprang after the man of the iron apron, seeing that the few surviving tribesmen were fleeing in as many different directions.

"Shoot him!" he cried to Kyrger, who had been watching the annihilation of the remaining foemen with interest.

Believing that Thorne was aided by supernatural powers, it had not occurred to the Samoyed to join in the mêlée. Now he shook his head.

"*Shaman menkva,*" he grunted. "A wizard and a devil."

It would have been quite useless to send an arrow after a wizard, Kyrger knew. Had not his friend and the wizard tried to slay each other and failed? How then could Kyrger be expected to slay the *shaman?*

Thorne swore under his breath and started in pursuit of the Ostiak. The lanky *shaman* seemed to float over ice ridges and rocks, his long hair flying out behind, his iron tunic rattling. Gaining the shore, he shrieked at his dogs and set to work to tie the second team by a leather thong to the first sled.

When this was done he hopped into the rear sled, cracked his whip and glided off as the beasts dug their claws into the trail and strained at the traces. The sleds picked up speed and presently whirled out of sight in a smother of snow, the *shaman* peering back at his pursuer, his pointed teeth gleaming between writhing lips.

Thinking of Joan and Peter bound in the camp, Thorne settled down grimly to the trail. His heavy boots made clumsy going on the hard surface and the cries of the wizard and the snapping of the whip drew farther away from him.

Kyrger had lingered on the *Confidentia* to visit each of the wounded Ostiaks and when he dropped from the ladder Durforth's ill fated ship had added to her crew of dead men.

CHAPTER XV

DARKNESS

BY THE fire that Kyrger had built, Thorne found Peter stretched like a stout log in the snow, his arms bound to his side, and a blue bruise swelling in his tangle of red hair. He was still breathing, and Thorne dragged him into the Samoyed's sledge, covering him up with the skin of the white bear to keep him from freezing to death. Joan was gone; so were the dogs and their master, and the reindeer. After a little Kyrger appeared and took in the scene with a comprehensive glance.

As best he could Thorne explained to the attentive hunter that they must follow the dog sleds. All other matters must wait until he had set Joan free from the creature in the leather apron.

"*Sinym — sinym thusind,*" muttered Kyrger nodding assent, for he saw that the outlander was very angry. "Young sister—the pursuit of blood atonement."

He lifted his head and called shrilly, and Thorne saw the two reindeer appear from the nearest thicket, munching at the branches as they came. They had been driven off by the *shaman* or had run away from the dogs. Thorne learned thereafter that dogs and reindeer were hostile as the two tribes that were served by each animal.

Kyrger lost no time in putting the reindeer into the leather traces, tying the guiding thong attached to their off horns to the hand bar of the sledge. Then he beckoned Thorne who discovered that the savage had picked up a pair of the wooden skates dropped by one of the Ostiaks. They were shorter than the Samoyed's and heavier, and Kyrger bound them firmly to Thorne's boots.

Then he led the outlander to the rear of the sledge and made him put his hands on the waist-high bar at the back.

"Thus," he murmured to himself, "we will go as swiftly as the white pigeon flying before the wind. Be quiet my master! Let your spirit be strong when we meet new enemies who dwell where winged things can not enter and things with bones can not pass. *Kai*—it will be a long journey, O Thunderer, O Leaner-Against-the-Wind."

He glided off and picked up the two staffs, which, pointed and bearing sizeable crosspieces a foot from the point, enabled him to push himself along rapidly where the snow surface was level, as if he were poling a light canoe through shallows.

Alone, he would never have started after the wizard, who could make the long journey to the hall of Erlik in the spirit world of the cold, underground region, or invoke *ermecin* the white bear.

But after the fight on the bark, Kyrger had immense confidence in Thorne. He believed that the armiger as well as the *shaman* was possessed by a spirit, whether the reindeer, the gull, the bear or the eagle, he did not know. How else had he scattered eleven Ostiaks?

He went ahead of the deer, running at times, but oftener thrusting himself onward a dozen paces with the staffs. Faster he went and faster, squatting on his haunches when the head of a slope was reached and flashing down with the speed of a flying thing.

The reindeer struck into their loose-limbed trot that covered distance amazingly. Thorne for a while had all he could do to hang on and keep his feet. Once the toe of his skis caught in a fallen branch and he was thrown heavily. But he soon learned how to lift himself over obstacles and to keep his feet together.

The gray obscurity of the day merged into the flickering radiance of night with its attendant fires in the northern sky. Kyrger looked like a winged gnome, speeding over the slot in the snow; Peter was no more than a motionless bulk under the fur pelt. Thorne could not stop and make camp for the shipman's sake. Joan, somewhere ahead of them was flying through this wilderness of unmarked snow.

The reindeer no longer seemed to him to be running. They flew through the air, their whitish bodies invisible in the smother of powdered snow, their black-muzzled heads laid back so that the horns rested along their shoulders.

HOW long they raced through the night he did not know. They were sliding down a winding gully where a few stunted larches thrust up through the drifts, when Kyrger whirled to a halt and strung his bow. His arrow sped and struck something invisible to Thorne. But the hunter pushed himself to where it lay and brought back a long white hare.

With his knife he stripped the skin off its back and offered it to the outlander. There was no time to stop to make a fire, even if wood had been at hand. The ache of hunger was strong enough for him to suck some of the blood from the hare; but then he handed it back to Kyrger, who ate the raw flesh, still steaming hot, without a qualm.

Meanwhile Thorne satisfied himself that Peter was breathing. From the gully they descended to the level surface of a frozen lake, down which the trail of the dog sleds ran. Here the reindeer, refreshed by the brief halt, made fast time and Thorne peered ahead for a sight of the Ostiak.

For hours they followed the windings of the lake, which grew steadily narrower. Trees appeared on either hand and soon they were moving between the solid walls of a forest of spruce and fir. When the strip of water was no more than a stream, Kyrger slowed down and halted his reindeer which had been running the last few miles with tongues lolling out.

Coming to Thorne's side, the Samoyed pointed above the trees ahead of them and to the right, and after a moment the armiger made out what his companion had seen, a wavering line of smoke rising against the gray sky.

For the first time Kyrger turned aside from the trail, leading his deer into a grove of spruce where they were sheltered from the wind. Then he took up the crossbow that he had placed in the sledge, and the two advanced through the timber in the direction of the smoke, the hunter circling to keep away from the stream.

They heard voices, distinct in the thin air, and crawled warily to the summit of a ridge. Here they crouched, motionless. Below them within stone's throw were three large dog sledges and a half dozen Ostiaks. Seated on a log beside the embers of a fire, Master Cornelius Durforth and Joan Andrews were talking. Squatting on a white horse skin near his two dog teams was the wizard they had pursued from the Ice Sea.

JOAN had been freed of her bonds by Durforth, who sent the *shaman* away from the maiden, and prepared food for her, with hot, spiced wine. Refreshed, she gazed curiously at the man who sat by her in his coat of black foxskin with an ermine collar. Joan knew the value of such things.

She saw, too, that the powerful fingers of his left hand played with the links of a gold chain at his throat; that his strong teeth glimmered through the tangle of his jutting beard. His brown eyes, utterly without expression, moved restlessly as if instinct made him uneasy. A sudden foreboding gripped Joan, who was as sensitive as a child, and fear burned in her veins more fiercely than when the *shaman* had thrown her into his sled.

She had seen that gold chain before, and the face that reminded her of a wolf. Too few events had come into the life of the daughter of John Andrews that she should forget one of them. Two years before at Yuletide, when the candles were lighted in the windows of Cairness—a ship driving into the haven for refuge—a stranger sitting in the tavern, listening to the tales of John Andrews of gold to be found by one who could pass south of the Ice Sea.

"Oh," she cried, "you are the master of the black pinnace!"

Cornelius Durforth did not take his eyes from the fire.

"I have had many ships to my command."

"The black pinnace with the dragon's head, that was manned by Burgundians."

"Ah. Then you—" he looked at her—"would be John Andrews' daughter."

"Aye, so. And so was my father slain by your churls."

"How?"

"Your pinnace entered the haven of Wardhouse—" Joan faltered, but passionate anger, long pent up, was rife in her—"and your knaves looted it over the body of John Andrews, who once gave you shelter."

"Did they so? By the Three Dead Men of Cologne, they were not my knaves. The boat once carried my flag and was made a prize by pirates out of Danemarke."

His lips drew back in a soundless laugh.

"They paid in good coin for their frolic; I saw the boat with their bodies hanging like ripe fruit, drifting down the coast."

His words carried conviction but the girl drew back from his face.

"Who are you?" she barely whispered.

"Cornelius Durforth, the Burgundian. What, wench, have you never heard of the merchant of Ghent?"

Her mind flitted among questions. What was Durforth doing on the Ice Sea? How had he escaped alone from the stricken ships of the English? Why had the Ostiak brought her to him?

He thrust out his hand to take her chin and study her face.

"Nay, wench, you wear your heart upon your sleeve. You are fair as a golden eaglet, but, on my faith, only a hooded falcon may sit on perch at its master's table. Weigh well your answer to this question: Do you trust me? Are you friend or unfriend?"

Whereat she sighed and dropped her gaze to the chain of gold about his neck.

"Good my master, who am I to stand against your will? Take me with you out of this forest to Christian folk, and I will thank you on my knees. But let us set out at once!"

In silence Durforth considered her, until a flush mantled her cheeks and his beard bristled in a wide smile.

"So! I am no wizard like Shatong the *shaman*—" he nodded at the Ostiak who was tapping on a drum between his knees, upon a white horsehide—"yet can I read your mind. You fear me, you have no faith in me. A witless boy follows the track of your sled through the wilderness, and it is your thought that if he rushes in upon us here he will be slain, which, indeed is most true.

"Under a cloak of meekness you would have us set out so that he will see our following and learn caution, which is a thing he never will learn. In another hour or so your armiger will be wolf meat."

She drew away from the man, hands pressed against her cheeks.

"Would you slay him shamefully in this pagan land?"

"That will I, and he would do no less for me. By the eyes of —— you should know no land is wide enough to hold us twain. He serves his king, who is shent—aye, who lieth under sod ere now. Hath a man allegiance to the dead?"

"Aye, so," the girl responded promptly.

"Then is he a traitor. For—and here is a merry matter—the lord prince who laid command upon me to voyage hither is now your squire's lord."

"That may not be," she cried passionately, "I think you are liegeman to Satan, prince of darkness."

"Some do call him that. And, by the Three Dead Men, if Mephistophele were annointed monarch on this earth, he would not lack for followers, being both sagacious, courteous and untainted by remorse. Yet I serve Philip, son of the Emperor Charles, the mightiest lord in Christiandom. And this same Philip will sit presently upon the throne of England."

While he spoke he had been studying the maiden, marking the tawny hair held back by the hood, the slight, firm lips and the pulse that beat in a white throat. Such beauty would command its price, and Durforth knew the very barons who would lighten their purses of a hundred gold crowns to possess her.

Yet he was embarked upon a delicate mission, and it was necessary that her tongue should be silent as to what she had seen on the Ice Sea, and what she would presently behold. He considered permitting Shatong to cut out her tongue; but she might be able to write.

Women he knew were like hawks. Tamed and hooded, fed and wing-clipped, they would be content under the hand of a master for a while—until he could be paid his price for the maiden. To tame her, she must first learn to fear him.

Unclasping his cloak, he took from the breast of his doublet two papers, folded and sealed. These he held near the fire, for the light was dim under the trees, so that she could see the imperial signet on the seals. When he saw that she had recognised it, he put the letters back very carefully in a silk pouch attached to the end of his gold chain.

"These letters missive," he said, "are from Charles of Spain to Ivan the Terrible, emperor of Muscovy, and they are my charge."

"Sir Hugh's letters——"

Durforth's head went back and he laughed from an open throat, a roaring laugh that reached to the ears of Thorne and the hunter who crouched behind the ridge, waiting until darkness could cover their approach to the fire. Yet they heard not the words of the agent of Philip.

"Death of my life, wench, Sir Hugh's letters are ashes long since. Sir Hugh gallant fool! Sir Hugh, lack-wit leader! Why, he ventured blindly into the Ice Sea. He sailed in circles when he lost company with Chancellor, and he proposed to winter in an open bay without fuel or food."

Shivering, she looked up at him, and he took a savage pleasure in heightening the horror in her eyes.

"*I* had ventured to the northern coast before this, and had talked with the Easterlings. *I* knew the peril of the *khylden* and the cold that stiffens a man's sinews and soul. So I haled me from the fleet, to the southeast where the tribe of Ostiaks had their dwelling. Before we could return to the ships the storms had snuffed out the Englishmen.

"My pinnace had fallen foul of the Laps, and the lads that manned it were drying i' the wind. I had sent it to the Wardhouse so that I might sail in it to the inland sea, and thither into Muscovy. But it fell out otherwise.

"So was I set afoot. And by mischance that murdering wight Thorne, who hath crossed my path twice before now, was journeying along the coast. My Ostiaks sighted your fire on Christmas night, and I sent Shatong with ten others to the ships to greet your comrades while I conveyed the goods I had taken from the *Confidentia* hither and awaited the coming of the savages."

Again he laughed, for Durforth could enjoy a jest.

"Body of —— Thorne played in luck there. The Ostiaks had never heard a gun roar. But Shatong is a match for your wildling squire. Aye, that long haired imp is a familiar of the powers of darkness."

"God grant," cried Joan, "that Master Chancellor meets with you."

"If you wish the pilot well, pray otherwise," responded Durforth grimly, "I know where he must lie, if he lives, and it should go hard but I bring the Easterling pack upon his back."

Into Joan's whirling thoughts came memories of childhood tales, of werewolves that took the form and semblance of men by day and turned to beasts at nightfall, of beasts that ran to join the unhallowed company of the witches' sabbath.

"How did you gain this power over the savages?" she whispered, fearful of hearing what was in her mind.

Durforth's face seemed to change, and the fire in his brown eyes died down.

"Power?" He waxed thoughtful. "Why, I can speak with them. Power springs always from wealth, because it feeds the desire of men. I promised Shatong riches incalculable if he would guard me with his men to the Town of Wooden Walls which is the door to Russia, or Muscovy. I promised to show him the mystery of gunpowder."

He was gazing at her now, narrowly.

"My hold on them is slight. Remember that. And now say if you will cast your lot with me?"

"I will not. For-by you have said that you sent the pinnace that wrought evil to my father."

Durforth shook his head slowly.

"Here is irony. 'Tis true the men and the ship were mine, but I did order them to conduct themselves straitly and do no harm, for fear of a broil with the English rovers. They fell a-plundering."

It amused him that he, who had been forced to lie without cessation, should not gain credit for the one truth.

"I see," he added, "you will have none of me. May the foul fiend take you, slut, did'st think an empire is built out of billing and cooing and tying of breast-knots? Shatong, then, shall have you."

Glancing into her stricken face, he moved impatiently.

"My pretty vixen, I put no value on your beauty, nor does Shatong. He will e'en have a use for you."

Durforth laughed again in amusement at her obvious signs of fear.

* * *

NOW as he beckoned to the *shaman* who had been peering at them and at the ridges about the camp, through the tangle of his long hair, Durforth's eyes began to glow. His tongue touched his lips and a certain eagerness was apparent as he signed for the Ostiak to lead away the maiden.

"*Khada ulan obokhod*," the wizard muttered. "The dead souls that dwell in the mountains and high places have spoken to me. They say the man who is your enemy is near this place. I can bring him to the fire."

Durforth looked at the old savage curiously. He was more than a little superstitious, and he had seen the *shaman* do unaccountable things.

"Before the last of the light is gone, I will bring him." Shatong's thin hand closed on Joan's arm. "But I must take the maiden for this work."

The man nodded, and Shatong led Joan to a stone on the other side of the fire, and went to his horsehide. Striking on the drum slowly he began a song, the copper bells and the iron trinkets on his leather apron keeping a rude sort of time.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WHITE BEAR

KYRGER, flat on his belly in the snow, wriggled uneasily. They had been too far away for Thorne to hear what was said between the two outlanders, but Shatong's shrill voice was distinct enough in the thin air. Kyrger knew that the *shaman* was trying to draw Thorne to the Ostiaks, although the white man was clearly waiting for darkness before he made any move.

More logs were thrown on the fire, and as dusk fell the figure of the *shaman* was covered with a ruddy tinge. On one knee he bent over the drum, chanting his discordant song. Then he rose to his toes and spread out his arms, moving toward Durforth.

Kyrger knew by this that the *kam*, the spirit of the wizard, had become separated from his body and was flying through the air. Shatong, therefore, meant to journey to the cold underground region where Erlik ruled the spirit world.

"The dead souls say," chanted the wizard, "I must cut myself. I will cut myself with your knife."

Durforth handed the savage his dirk and Shatong crept nearer the girl. Thorne rose to his knees, taking the crossbow from Kyrger, but uttered a stifled exclamation of astonishment. Shatong had thrust the weapon under his own gaunt ribs. Or so it seemed. His two hands gripped the hilt and blood ran down upon his apron. The blade of the dirk had disappeared.

Presently the *shaman* drew it forth, stained with blood, and screamed. Joan hid her face in her hands.

Durforth, chin on hand, seemed unmoved; but his eyes were intent. Meanwhile Shatong took up his journey to the presence of Erlik. He went through the motions of leaping over mountains and staggering through the sands of a desert; then he walked forward gingerly swaying from side to side.

Kyrger knew that the spirit of the wizard was moving over the single hair that bridges the abyss between the land of the living and the abode of the dead souls.

He watched Shatong cringe back as if at the gate of Erlik's domain—heard the snarling chorus of welcome from the dogs of the underworld—saw Shatong driven back by a gust of wind, then approach fearfully the seat of Erlik, represented by the fire.

The chorus of animal cries grew louder, though Shatong's lips did not move. Invisible wings beat overhead, and Kyrger's skin grew cold. He knew what would follow.

Shatong lifted his hands to his lips as if drinking the welcoming cup, and fell down in a huddle on the trampled snow. His dark skin glistened with sweat. At this moment his *kam* was listening to the words of Erlik.

He bounded to his feet and pointed toward the trees where Thorne and Kyrger were hidden.

"Winged creatures can not fly hither; things with bones can not come; how have you made your way to my abode?"

Staggering, he laid his hand on his chest.

"I have ridden far, my strength fails; I have faced great terrors, and I am hungry."

So saying, he advanced on Joan who drew back, half faint with fear. Grasping the fur surcoat at her throat, he jerked it away and bared a white shoulder with his claw. His teeth snapped and his lips writhed as he drew nearer the girl's arm.

Kyrger sat up on his haunches with a grunt of dismay. Shatong, he saw, had prevailed, because now, without any effort to draw back his companion, the white man, was running toward his enemies.

THORNE at first had taken up the crossbow; but the wavering fire light and the numbness in his fingers made the risk too great for a shot. Moreover, to kill Shatong would not free Joan. As he plodded forward through the snow she saw him and cried out clearly:

"Get you hence, Master Ralph. They lie in wait for you."

At this the *shaman* released her and turned to his men, saying something in a low voice. To Durforth he added triumphantly:

"*Lili khel mkholas*—my soul looked into the hiding place of this enemy. My soul summoned him forth from the hiding place."

Durforth, who did not know that the sharp eyes of the wizard had picked out the armiger on the ridge, was more than a little startled. Whether or no Shatong had planned his ritual of the drum and the spirit visit to hearten himself or to bring the outlander forth would be difficult to say.

Because his limbs were stiff with cold Thorne moved slowly, and Durforth at first did not recognize the gaunt figure in the wolfskin hood and jacket. And the newcomer, instead of putting hand to sword or approaching Joan, went to the fire and stretched out his hands, first taking the mittens off, to warm them at the blaze.

"I give you greetings, Master Durforth," he said quietly.

The voice and the smile that accompanied it banished the last doubt in the mind of Philip's agent.

"Slay me this man," he said to Shatong, after a long breath of hesitation. "I will give the price of five deerskins to the one who takes his life with the first arrow," he added when the *shaman* made no response.

But Shatong was squatting again on his white horsehide mumbling to himself. And the six natives had eyes only for the wizard. If Thorne had rushed at them, or shouted or drawn his weapon they would have stretched him in the snow at once. Meanwhile Shatong had arrived at a decision; his slits of eyes glimmered at the white men and he gabbled at Durforth.

"I am very weary with the long journey to the Erlik-hall. My ears are filled with the beating of spreading wings. Lo, one of the wings veils the moon; the other hides the sun. I have flown with the mother of eagles over Yaik. I can not hear your words, outlander."

Placing his hand before his eyes he turned his back on Durforth, who repeated his order to the others, increasing the bounty he offered for the visitor's life. But the Ostiaks continued to gaze at him with wooden features, and he understood that they would do nothing for the moment. Shatong, after throwing wood on the fire to make it brighter, would do nothing at all.

He had been watching the strange white man. He saw that Thorne's motions were assured and purposeful. Shatong had felt the other's sword rasp his ribs, and the skin of his face still stung from the powder that had belched from the cannon.

This young outlander might cause a second explosion at any moment, he reasoned. Evidently the other's *kam*, his tutelary diety was powerful, and unfriendly to Shatong's *kam*. Durforth's power, too, was doubtful. So Shatong waited to see what would happen.

"These be men of power. No hoofed beast can protect itself against them, creatures with claws flee away. There is a *thusind*, a pursuit of blood between them. Let us see what they will accomplish."

Durforth rose and advanced to the fire with hand outstretched.

" 'Od's life, Master Thorne, I greet you well! In this pagan land we can not afford to nourish our late quarrel. We must abet one another. So, let us cry a truce."

He had no means of knowing that the armiger had caught the gist of his command to Shatong, and he thought to silence Joan with a warning glance. This had quite another effect on the girl.

"Do not put faith in him," she said instantly, "for he will not keep faith with you."

Thorne motioned her to be silent.

"Yield ye," he said to Durforth. "Throw down your weapons if you are bent on life."

The man in the fox skins still held out his hand, but he was thinking. And Philip had not chosen an agent for a dull wit.

Durforth said slowly:

"Bethink you, Master Thorne, Edward hath breathed his last by now. The odds are, Mary is queen, and so is England joined to Spain. What will it profit you to meddle with me?"

"Because we are here in the hands of savages I offer you a fair surrender. We have this maid to bear to safety, and you know the way. Yield and I will do what in me lies to bring you to England. For the rest, I care not. Yield your sword or draw it."

"You are bold, young sir, and foolhardy." He paused. "Why do you press this quarrel when it mars both our fortunes?"

"Because," quoth the armiger, "I have looked upon the bodies of a hundred honest men, marred by your treachery. Come——"

Durforth started and looked beyond him at the shadows of the forest, open mouthed. Thorne, noticing the quick dread in the other's face, turned to see what had caused it. In the thicket he perceived that something moved, something white and massive. Then he sprang to one side.

In the second when he had taken his gaze from the merchant, Durforth had stooped to pick up from the snow the dagger left there by the *shaman*. No sooner had his fingers closed upon it than he lunged at Thorne's back. The sudden movement in so big a man had aroused the armiger, who stepped wide of the thrust, drawing his sword as he did so.

"Ha, stand to your guard, rogue. No one will come between us this time."

Durforth recovered his balance and his composure at once. He had acted before he thought; the blood stained knife had caught his eyes as Thorne turned away. Taking off his surcoat, he stood in doublet and boots, smiling a little. In drawing his sword he whipped it through a salute.

"A pity, my hotspur, that you gave your allegiance to the wrong prince. Had you cast your lot with Mary and Spain we twain might have gone far."

WHILE Joan sat upon her log, her eyes glued to the flicker of the two rapiers that gleamed ruddy in the fire light, the Ostiaks followed with absorbing interest the struggle between the two outlanders.

In the treacherous footing of the trodden snow they moved warily. Durforth, who had the dirk in his left hand, sought to come to close quarters; failing that, he circled to get the fire at his back and drive Thorne out into the deeper snow. Red light played up and down the bright blades, and the slithering click of steel punctuated the quick breathing of the men.

Shatong saw that Durforth's face had changed, it had darkened, the beard jutting out, the forehead creased. The lips were drawn back, and Shatong saw in this face the likeness of a wolf. So, he reasoned, the taller outlander served the wolf spirit.

The other, whose yellow mane gleamed in the firelight, who fought with closed lips, he fancied served the *quoren vairgin*, the reindeer spirit. And it was well known that the wolf-clan was powerful enough to tear to pieces a member of the reindeer clan. And, certainly, the clan of *ermecin*, the great white bear, would prevail over either. So Shatong reasoned, while he crawled around the fire to watch the struggle of the white men.

Durforth pressed the attack now, following thrust with thrust. Both men, the *shaman* thought, were tiring, and Thorne was staggering. It was clear to the Ostiak that Durforth's *kam* was the stronger, and he began to breath quickly in anticipation of the end.

He saw Thorne stumble in a drift over a fallen tree and go down on one knee. Durforth sprang in, cutting down his adversary's blade, and struck with the knife. Thorne had not tried to rise, but gathered his strength and lunged as Durforth came down on him.

Shatong saw a point of steel through Durforth's back; saw the big man rise to his toes and fall forward, soundlessly, into the drift.

Freeing his blade, Thorne turned about in time to face the rush of the Ostiaks led by Shatong. The *shaman* had not expected to see Durforth go down, but now he knew that the other outlander must be exhausted. The three sled loads of goods from the ships would be his in another moment.

Something whirred past the *shaman* and thudded into the back of the foremost Ostiak. It was a crossbow bolt and it knocked the man from his feet. The others turned to stare at the forest and yelled in shrill and astonished fear.

Two figures were advancing on them from the trees, Kyrger running in advance, fitting an arrow to his small bow. Behind him, grasping the crossbow that he had picked up when the Samoyed let it fall, was Peter. Peter with the skin of the polar bear wrapped around him, the muzzle over his head, his face almost invisible between the gaping jaws.

Some hours since the shipman had awakened from the stupor into which he had fallen after the blow on the head dealt him by Shatong. His heavy leather cap and stout skull had brought him off none the worse except for a mighty bruise over one ear. Kyrger had roused him by thrusting the end of the crossbow into his ribs.

By frantic signs the Samoyed had made it clear to Peter that trouble was brewing near at hand, and the shipman had lumbered off without delaying to rid himself of the bearskin. Heaving into sight of the fire, he was in time to see Durforth go down and the Ostiaks rise from their haunches and rush at Thorne.

"Stand to quarters, lad!" he bellowed. "Lay them by the board!"

Shrewd Shatong saw what effect this apparition of the burly man in the white fell had upon his followers. They had not known that another outlander was present, so intent had they been upon the duel. And the skin of the white bear filled them with superstitious dread.

"*Ermecin!*" they cried.

No Ostiak had ever slain a white bear. And while they hung back, gripped alike by fear and the blood lust, Shatong ran at Peter from the side, swinging his club.

Out of the corner of his eyes the shipman saw him, and swung the crossbow down and outward in a powerful hand. The steel bow, and the iron-tipped head struck the *shaman* on the temple.

Without a cry Shatong's body dropped upon the earth, seeming to shrink into its grotesque garb of leather and jangling iron, its long hair covering the shattered skull and the gap where his eyes had been.

A shout from Kyrger, who had beheld what was in his estimation a miracle, brought home to the Ostiaks the fact that they were dealing with men, not spirits. One of the eight sent an arrow through the little hunter.

Others swarmed upon Peter, screaming and stabbing. It was Thorne's sword that checked their rush. The armiger, thrusting and warding, strengthened by the brief rest, put down two of his assailants, and drove another back on the huddle around Peter.

In this hand to hand struggle the Easterlings could not use their bows; but Peter, dropping the crossbow, used his fists. He knocked one man headlong, and Thorne, bruised by a thrown club, ran another through the heart. The deadly play of the rapier was more than the rest could stomach and they fled beyond the circle of firelight, vanishing into the gloom under the trees.

"Faith," muttered Peter, glancing around, "we were sore beset, but we cleared the deck. Where lie the ships?"

He was astonished past belief when he understood that they were twenty leagues from the coast and Sir Hugh's vessels.

WHILE Peter and Joan washed Kyrger's hurt and made him comfortable on some cloths from the goods on the sleds, Thorne put more wood on the fire and—when Joan told him all that had passed between her and Durforth—took the letters from the pouch of the Burgundian. Carefully he read them through after breaking the seals, and when he had done, placed them in his belt.

"In these missives," he said to the expectant girl, "lieth the true way to Cathay."

"Is it far?" she wondered. "Could we adventure there?"

He smiled at her wish.

"Nay, Joan. There is no passage by sea; but the way by land hath been discovered already by the Muscovites. The silks and spices, aye, the ivory and carpets of Cathay and the Indies are borne each year through Tatary to the emperor of the Muscovites, Ivan, called the 'Terrible,' and entitled in these missives emperor of Astrakhan and lord of the forests and the Sibir Desert."

"Now marry and amen!" cried Peter who had come up, and had been fingering Durforth's chain longingly. "Here is that same lord Ivan or John of the land of gold and silver. The dons were wiser than we. What more, lad?"

"Why, simply this: The Spaniards desired Ivan to make a compact with them, so that the trade of the Indies could be borne overland, which is shorter by much than the sea route to the Indies, to them. They would have the great Emperor Ivan know that they are masters of all Christiandom, save England which will soon be under their hand."

"Then," cried Joan angrily, "we must bear these missives to the lords of England, and rouse them to their peril."

"Faith, Joan—" the armiger laughed outright—"are you Puss-in-Boots, to girdle the earth, east or west? We will do what we can, but if we are to live we must gain the borders of Muscovy."

"What says the other missive?" pressed the boatswain, who had great faith in letters.

"Cornelius Durforth, the Burgundian, was a trusted councilor of Spain." He glanced down thoughtfully at the body of his enemy: "Peter, 'tis my thought that the Fox is dead."

"How?" quoth the shipman, scratching his head. "Messems we left my lord Renard on his feet."

"It is evident," said Thorne, "that Renard was Durforth's man. And Durforth was Philip's spy called by us the Fox. While we watched Renard, the Fox came and went. D'Alaber served him and came against me while Durforth waited. When there is a killing to be managed, 'tis the servant who handles the knife while the lord waits the result."

"Your father!" cried Joan and fell silent.

"Aye, Durforth desired his end, and Renard saw that it was done. The spy's work in Burgundy was finished long since; his task in England done, and but for one thing he would have gained to the court of Ivan."

"Your sword, it was," said Joan proudly.

"Nay, greed. Durforth was petty in craving gold. He stopped to snatch it where he could. He went back to plunder the ships when Sir Hugh and his brave company died."

Peter put his hands behind him and looked away from the Burgundian's sword hilt and gold chain.

"The black rogue!"

"Nay—" Thorne shook his head—"rogue he may have been, but brave he was. Now that he is sped it is not honorable in us to miscall him."

CHAPTER XVII

THE INLAND SEA

IT IS written in the chronicles of that reign how the armiger and the shipman, knowing not whither they should take their course, turned southeast as Durforth's route had been planned.

So it was said of them that the hand of Durforth which had been ever against them, living, now guided them out of the *tayga*, the dense forest of the Easterlings. They drove the dog sleds, loaded with trade goods, and Joan made shift to drive Kyrger's reindeer and the sledge on which the wounded Samoyed lay. They took their course from the stars.

And so they left the fires in the sky behind them and came out on a snow plain without track or tree or village. Still Thorne pressed south and east. He would not change his course for any direction that seemed likelier, and because of this they passed through a girdle of hills and found themselves on the shore of a sea that stretched to the horizon.

Its waters were a clear green, unlike the dull gray of the Ice Sea, and for this reason Thorne said they could not be the same.

And following this coast they came to men spearing seals among the ice cakes. Some of these men were Muscovites, but in their number was Master Stanton, gunner of the *Edward*, who greeted them with a glad outcry.

And from this same Master Stanton they learned what was afterward set down in the chronicle, that when Richard Chancellor parted from the Wardhouse, he held on his course toward the unknown region of the world, aided by the continual light.

Coming to the mouth of what seemed a great bay, he entered and sailed many a league to the south without seeing land again. But they came upon a fishing boat manned by barbarians who were filled with amazement at the great size of his ship.

He entreating them courteously, they made report in the villages of the Muscovites of the arrival of a strange nation of a singular gentleness. Master Chancellor was conducted to a town built on a fair harbor, within wooden walls*, and was told that this was the bay of St. Nicholas and the sea was the White Sea, which ran far into the dominions of the great prince Ivan.

Master Chancellor departed to seek this prince at his court in Moscow, leaving the *Edward* at anchor in charge of Burroughs. And so began the trade of Muscovy with the outer world, for it was a land rich in gold and silver and furs. As for Thorne the armiger and Joan Andrews, they fared to the court of Ivan the Terrible and what there befell them is set down in the chronicles for all to see.

But when Kyrger's wound healed he harnessed up his reindeer and journeyed back to the Ice Sea. It was more than he could endure to live within walls, and in the beginning of spring he reached the Wardhouse where Tuon and his Laps had taken up their quarters to watch the possessions of Joan Andrews and to wait whatever would take place.

Kyrger the hunter spread under their eyes the skin of *ermecin*, the white bear, and squatted down on it, taking full heed of the astonishment of the Laps.

"*O nym tungit*," he murmured, "O my tent companions, since I turned my face from the north star many new fires have taken their place in the gate in the sky. Many men have gone to greet Yulden to whom the three stairways lead."

He pointed to the skin.

"With an arrow my master slew this one. And with the bow that sent the arrow Shatong the *shaman* was struck down. The spirit that dwells in my master is very powerful. It is not the Reindeer-Being; it is not kin to the bear or the wolf or the eagle."

The listeners held up their hands in bewilderment.

"O, my brothers harken, for this is a very great magic and a thing beyond belief. My master hurries through the forest, looking neither to right nor to left; when he is in trouble he makes a magic with water that burned, and ice put upon a tree; he went against his enemies and the blood feud is atoned.

"In the Town of Wooden Walls he claimed the *sinym*—the young maiden—for his bride, although there were many warriors of her race who cast their eyes upon her.

"The spirit that dwells in him is that of the *khylden*. He has run with the snowdriver. So in all things it is better, O my friends, to follow him than to stand against him."

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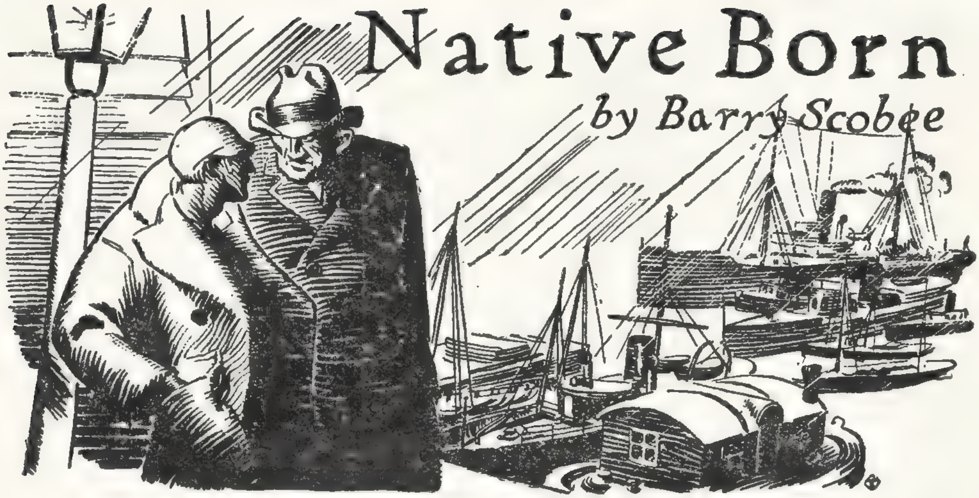
*Archangel.

Native Born

by Barry Scobee



Author of "Empty Cartridges," "Best Bugler in the World," etc.

LEEPER was a small-town loafer. Easy jobs were scarce, so he tried his hand at bootlegging. The first thing he knew a grand jury indicted him. He beat the sheriff out of town by a dodge and a jump.

"Leep," as the boys called him for short, had never been anywhere except to ball games in the next villages. But a lot of Missourians went annually to the Kansas wheat fields, and following this lead he struck out to the harvest.

The greeniper liked the money and freedom and strange sights—liked everything except the foreigners in the fields, and these he secretly despised and mistrusted.

He had been born and raised where every man and his wife was of American Anglo-Saxon stock with ancestory traceable back through Kentucky and Virginia, or Ohio and Vermont, for a hundred years or more. His closest contact with foreigners had been to buy socks and suspenders from Jewish and Syrian pack peddlers at his mother's door, and the readiness with which these wore out only cultivated his instinctive prejudices.

He followed the wheat north into Canada. The British-stock Canadians did not seem foreign to him; but there were Swedes, Norwegians, Danes and Russians to make his hackles rise mildly, sometimes by their superior qualities, sometimes by their inferior ways.

His prejudices, however, were not sufficient to turn him back, and by the time snow flew he was wondering what the Pacific Ocean looked like. This curiosity, and the Missouri indictment that was like a dig in the ribs every time he thought of it, turned him westward on the tramp.

Entering the province of British Columbia, the alien atmosphere seemed to thicken. Turbaned, mysterious Hindus and Chinese with their inscrutable faces were to the right of him and to the left of him at every other turn. It became increasingly more difficult to get a little job of light work or a hand-out or a night's lodging, and he blamed it on the foreigners.

Leeper hit Vancouver on a cold and rainy day in the middle of winter, broke, starved and dirty.

He made his way from the "yards" to Hastings Street and along the waterfront trying to raise a job or a meal, and finally toward dark arrived at Denman Street and presently beheld something the like of which his inland eyes had never seen before.

Right under his nose in a cove lay a hundred, two hundred, an indefinite number, of fishing boats, speedboats, houseboats, little launches and big launches—seemingly every variety of small craft tied up close together in rows and all waltzing to the movement of tide and wind.

Leep, standing in the rainy glow of a street light, stared open-eyed at the marine display. He suddenly had the sense of being looked at, and turned. A man stepped from a shadowy doorway, as if he had been waiting there. The Missourian slammed a question at him.

"What kind o' ships are they?"

The man, a short, thick, foreign-appearing fellow with a broad face and thick lips, grinned amusedly, never taking his prying stare from Leep.

"She's the Coal Harbor fleet," the stranger answered. "Some rum-runnin' boats out dere."

"Rum-runnin'?" Leep bit at the word as if it were meat. "To the United States?"

"Sure. What you s'pose?"

The inlander scanned the fleet anew. Lights were blooming among the boats. A smell of frying fish and of hominy was wafted across his hunger-sharpened nose. He spoke to the stranger again.

"Think I could land a job on one of those rum-runnin' boats?"

The man put a cautious question edged with insolence.

"Where you come from?"

"Middy, Missouri. And," added Leep in recommendation of himself, "I left hocus-pocus presto change because a grand jury indicted me for sellin' a little of the stuff from the boot. I'd make a good rum hand."

"Sure, I give you a job."

"Rum-running?"

"Sure."

"Good pay?"

"Sure. Come along wit' me."

Leep hesitated. Plainly the man was a foreigner. Leep's mistrust was all over his gaunt, freckled face. The stranger saw it and added bait to his hook.

"Plenty good chow," he urged.

The fragrance of frying hominy was wafted across Leep's bows again. It was more than he could resist.

"Lead on, Romeo," he said.

He followed the stranger down a stairs and along a dipping duck-board pier. Boats were on either side in rows like horses hitched head-and-tail and tugging at their halters restless to go. After a moment of this unstable footing they came to a long, narrow boat and climbed on board—a hard, cold, metal thing that had even to Leep the earmarks of speed. The only protuberance was a sloping glass windshield at the rear of the cabin to protect the helmsman at the wheel.

The squat leader detached the steed's halters fore and aft as if in preparation to depart. Then, opening a door that let out a flood of light, he led into the cabin structure. A many-cylindered engine glittering with brass was partly beneath, and partly to one side of a bridge they crossed to another door. The man opened this door, gestured Leep through, and closed it on his back.

The Missourian was in a lighted cabin. The stench of crowded human beings filled his nostrils. He was compelled to descend four steps before he could stand upright. Then he stood blinking in the light at ten or twelve men lined along the wall seats, their stretched-out feet mingling down the middle. Every lounging man Jack of them looked alien.

Every eye was turned on Leep, some hard, some dull. It was a medley of men. Two of the faces were bearded. There was a turbaned Hindu and a Chinese in cap and overalls. All the faces were vicious in some degree, or reckless, or inane.

Sudden misgiving seized Leep, warning him to escape. He fumbled behind him for the door knob. In that instant the engine, just through the metal bulkhead, exploded with the noise of starting, and the boat scraped along the piling. Leep sensed that it was too late to escape.

Beyond the barrier of feet Leep caught sight of a little old dried-up man in a tiny cell doing something at a gasoline stove with a pot and ladle. He mumbled something about supper, and Leep, cold, gaunt as an empty sack, his ragged overcoat and his ragged shoes rain-soaked, went plunging forward.

The feet in his way were not withdrawn swiftly. It irritated him. The impudence of foreigners toward an American! Then the boat careened. It unbalanced Leep. He went to his knees, his head into a man's lap. The heel of the man's hand shoved him away roughly. Leep saw a thin-lipped, white face.

"Say!" Leep protested angrily. "Watch what y're doin'!"

He straightened up, half of a mind to swat the fellow. But he kept on. A pair of steps put him to the galley door, across which was laid a shelf or counter. Leep thought he smelled hominy. Behind the counter the little old man, mincing a cud rapidly with his front teeth or gums, set out bread and a steaming bowl of something.

"Goulash for ye," he said.

The strange name, the strange odor, instead of hominy, fanned Leep's peevishness.

"Aw," he snarled, "ain't you got some fried hominy?"

"Hominy!" popped the dried-up wisp. "Boy, y're from Arkingsaw."

Leep's heart jumped with joy.

"You're American!" he cried.

"I ain't."

"Come off!"

"I ain't! I was. Bornded in the U. S. Name's Smith. But I done brushed the dust o' that land off the seat of me pants forever."

The Missourian gaped in amazement at such disloyalty. Smith, as he named himself, spat disdainfully at a port hole by his elbow. But the hole was closed with a bolted steel plate and the amber juice ran down. The blunder increased his waspishness. He wiped off the stain with his dishcloth and barked out at Leep:

"Don't ye ever say U. S. to me again. It's been took over by the middle classes and us extreme rich and poor ain't got no opporchunities left. Don't ever say U. S. to me again; d'ye hear?"

He was trembling in his wrath, a bitter, shaken old reed, and he took up a butcher knife and cuddled it so lovingly that Leep subsided behind his bowl of goulash, forgetting all else at the first taste.

BUT there were too many new things for him to keep quiet long. When the cook set out a cup of coffee Leep put a confidential inquiry.

"Say, what's all the gang?"

Smith sniffed.

"This guy that hired me," Leep persisted, "what does he want me for? Who is he?"

Some of the men behind Leep snickered, and the cook broke out vehemently.

"You long, hungry, freckled greenhorn, that guy's Zaunich, king o' the rum pirates of Puget Sound. And this is his boat. The *Sea Horse*. Fastest thing on the Pacific coast. Built o' steel. Turns U. S. machine-gun bullets. And right now Zuanich is out there pilotin' her in the wake of a slow rum-runner that he'll hijack and sink when he hits U. S. waters. That's who this guy is."

Leep pondered this a moment while the smooth, oiled clanking of the engine came through the bulkhead; then he blurted out the thought uppermost in his mind.

"And him a foreigner," he said.

Instantly a grim, bony-faced, big-fisted man stood up and whirled the Missourian around.

"What's being foreign got to do wit' it?" he demanded resentfully.

To Leep it had plenty to do with it. From A-B-C days he had been nurtured on the milk that no alien would dare defy the sovreignty of the United States and that no alien was in any sense superior to an American; yet here was a foreign fellow called king of the rum pirates, therefore by inference better than any American pirate; and who was smuggling into the United States, using a bullet-proof boat to defy the law, and who was hiring Americans to work for him in a menial capacity. Resistance gathered in Leep.

The bony-faced fellow flung out again:

"What you say about foreign men? Hey?"

Leep remained insolently silent.

"You weak-knee Yank!" blared the man, gripping the lapels of Leep's old wet overcoat. "You speak me."

"Take your hands off," ordered Leep throatily. "I'm an American."

Another titter went through the crowd. Bony-Face drew back, deliberately preparing to strike, when the door at the head of the little stairway down into the cabin opened and the pirate Zuanish stood there.

"Vat's dis?" he growled. "Vike, take de wheel."

Bony-Face obediently turned away from the American. Zuanich came down. The two talked a minute in a foreign tongue; then Zuanich came forward and stuck his thick face up to Leep's, as nearly as he could reach, and broke out abruptly:

"You want know som't'ing, hey? Who's de guy dat hired you, hey? Me, Zuanich, a foreigner! Me, king o' de hijackers. I hired you. Me who don't take no lip from nobody. You like to ask some more before I knock you to sleep?"

Leeper's inwards contracted painfully. The gulped food, the stinking close cabin, the movement of the boat on the rough water and the violent men were having a bad physical and mental effect on him. He acutely did not wish to be struck. So he fenced. He blurted out an attempt at a jovial suggestion.

"Yuh might gimme a knock-down to your friends here, Zuanich, seein' as we're all in the same boat."

Cunning balefulness flashed into Zuanich's muddy black eyes, like a man seeing an opportunity to bait.

"Sure, I give you a knock down, Mister Yank from Middy, Missoury. Them along that side and by the door, dey are the foreign crew and dey hate Americans. Eat 'em alive. These four, foreign passengers what your immigration inspectors did not think good enough to let into the U. S. But I take 'em in. Their tickets cost them one t'ousand dollars apiece on my boat. I land them at Seattle. Purty soon me and Vike we go into court and swear by golly they been here a long time. The judge he make them good citizens of the U. S. A!"

Zuanish finished with a triumphant leer.

Coming through Canada Leep had heard talk of immigrant-running into the United States, and he realized what Zuanich meant. He stared at the four indicated. Two of them were bushy-bearded and unwashed; one was thin-lipped and white and cruel, he who had shoved Leep with the heel of his hand; and the fourth was a sort of ragged dandy, long, lank, stupid, with a little, waxed, up-ended mustache and a dull and empty eye. It was plain why the inspectors had not permitted them to enter, and at the thought of them calling themselves Americans, all the peevishness in the Missourian over the wet and cold and hunger and alienism knotted up in him for one fling of venom.

"You take these fouls to the United States, you king o' fouls, and I'll sick the officers on you!"

And for good measure he spat into Zuanich's face.

Zuanich was quick. His fist landed on Leep's chin, and the youth landed in the corner, not exactly knocked out but extremely reluctant to act further. He closed his eyes and lay still.

II

THE Missourian had not slept in a warm place for several nights. The heaviness resulting from the blow and his general stupor blended into heavy sleep, there where he sagged in a corner. The sleep of the reckless and condemned. Slept until he was yanked from his slumbers by Zuanich demanding that he get up and get out.

He could hardly get his eyelids apart. The hijacker shoved him out of the cabin before he realized that everybody else was out. The first sweep of the rainy night wind cleared his mind.

Leep caught a picture—the speedboat grappled to another boat with chains, lights on both craft, men scattered about, Vike and three others holding two young fellows in the forward end of the other boat.

Zuanich jerked him along.

"Take your dirty mitt off of me," Leep muttered.

"You see how I treat no-good Yankees," said the hijacker, pointing to the captives and captors. "Look on the fishin' boat. All right, Vike, sling 'em."

Immediately the captors rushed their prisoners to the bulwarks and shoved them over into the water.

Leep saw them by the dim light from the boats that the land was but a few yards away. The two young men quickly swam and waded to shore. When they straightened up on the bare rocks a pocket flashlight was turned on them. One shook his fist and shouted wildly, but the other only grinned thinly, and Leep instinctively knew that the grinning one was the dangerous one.

This incident finished, Leep was informed by Zuanich why a crew had been shipped to transfer liquor from the captured boat to the *Sea Horse*, for one thing. The wooden fishing boat was jammed with a cargo in its cabin.

Some of the men were set to passing it to the *Sea Horse*. One man was put to chopping off the mast. Vike got a dynamite charge ready with a short fuse. With these activities under way, the chief hijacker started the powerful engine on his own boat and, begun towing the prize, leaving the two wet Americans on the rocky shore.

The towing was continued an hour or more, the captive craft being run into a little bay at last. Not more than half the liquor was off, but the *Sea Horse* had all she could hold. The grappling chains were loosed, the fuse lighted, and the speedboat backed off. Presently there was a dull roar, a bulge and splash of water, and the wooden boat begun to sink by the stern.

"Tomorrow night," said Zuanich, feeling good over the venture, "we come back wit' diving armor and pull up the rest of the stuff. Meantime she lay there safe with nothing to show nosey interferers where she is."

When the victim sank Leep understood why the mast had been chopped off. Nothing remained above the surface to mark the location.

The *Sea Horse* raced on. The stormy night faded in a short time, and with the coming of a gray light Leep, gawking about like any landsman at sea for the first time, saw that they were approaching an island. Not a thing was visible on it in the way of habitation. It was scarcely more than a rock. Surprizingly, when Vike had run the speed boat in, there was a narrow, hidden anchorage among the shore rocks.

While Vike was making fast with padlocks and chains set into the stolid stone, Zuanich ordered the men into the cabin, and there, one at a time, he swiftly and effectively felt over them for arms. He removed two revolvers and three knives, the Chinese chattering protest, and locked them in a steel wall locker.

"Me, Zuanich, I carry the gun in this crowd," he said, patting a big automatic pistol on his belt.

At the pirate's orders the gasoline stove from the galley, various supplies, and blankets were lugged on shore and taken to a crude little shanty back in a cleft of the rocks behind a screen of brush and fir trees. The shanty, built of sea drift, had a little window in one end and a rickety door in the other, and the thirteen men that comprised the party well filled it, save for one corner that Smith the cook preempted for his own.

Zuanich, feeling fine, kept booming around. While breakfast was going forward he had the liquor carried and stacked behind the shack, a dozen quart bottles to each thick burlap sack. Goodfellow-like he opened a bottle and, drinking first to show that he wasn't afraid of it, passed it around to the bewhiskered immigrants and their companions, to the Chink and the Hindu and all the rest before he at last handed it to Leep. Without touching it to his lips, Leep stooped and cracked the bottle to smithereens on a boulder. Zuanich's good humor turned into a snarl.

"For why you do that?" he sang out.

"Think I'd drink after a foreigner?" retorted Leep.

"No? Vell den, you no eat wit' foreigners, either. You eat like dog—after gentlemens have finished." Zuanich was getting worked up. "Tonight you git the baddest work lifting that cargo of whisky. You'll like foreigners yet. 'Fore we git t'rough wit' this job you'll be on your knees to 'em."

Zuanich's fists were weaving before Leeper's face. Leep did not flinch an inch, but he grated out savagely in the dark, thick face:

"Don't you touch me! I'm an American!"

And because Leep somehow was mighty in his personal racial sanctity the hijacker was bluffed—bluffed by something that he did not understand but was willing to let pass if he could save his face. He dropped his fists and stepped back.

"You'll eat after the gentlemens finish," he said loudly.

Leeper had the shrewdness to see that Zuanich was giving in and the good sense to let him salvage his pride. He turned his back. The little crisis was past.

The island, as Leep discovered while the others were eating, was nothing but a point of rock thrust up. There was no beach save where the *Sea Horse* was shackled. From the peak forty feet above the water there was visible slaty gray channels whipped to whitecaps and seething waters, and wooded islands all around in the hazy, rainy distance; but he could not have signaled a boat had one been in sight, for a fringe of tree tops surrounded the peak, growing out beyond his reach. He could see out but could not have been seen.

After breakfast the gang slept somewhat in the shack, this extending through part of the forenoon, but as a whole the day went along miserably. The shack was warmed only by the gasoline stove from the speedboat's galley. Zuanich would not allow a fire in the crude fireplace because of the telltale smoke. The air was stale. Some of the foreigners played queer games of cards that the Missourian knew nothing about.

The Hindu and Chinamen kept passively aloof, even from each other, gazing at nothing. Zuanich and his four immigrants hobnobbed and gabbled in their foreign tongue, and judging by their laughter exchanged many a brutal and obscene story.

But there was something worse than

physical discomfort—an unanswerable undercurrent of mirth and mockery at Leeper's expense, particularly between Zuanich and his four, smirking and tittering and sputtering saliva on their beards or showing bad teeth. Leep's heart hardened steadily against such men ever claiming to be Americans.

Despite the squally rain and cold sea winds the inlander kept outside and away from the gang as much as possible. In the afternoon he spent some time examining the fine Marine engine on the *Sea Horse*, and when coming off he found Smith mooning about discontentedly.

"Expect a man to cook hotel style," he complained, "and nothing to do with."

"Measly bunch," seconded Leeper, hoping to win Smith for a friend to count on. "Gang o' rank foreigners."

"Huh, boy, they's foreigners that's human."

"Huh back at yuh, these's ain't. Take them four fouls into the belly of our country would be like swallering flies. But if I make a move Zuanich is likely to get rough. He's down on me, kinda. Tell yuh, Mr. Smith, us Americans—you and me—have got to stick together, haven't we?"

"Don't call me an American! I'm a man without a country. I'm international. I'll never set foot on the U. S. again."

"Why, you're on it now, 'cording to what you said this morning."

"Huh, just in the San Juan Islands in the north end o' Puget Sound, one kangaroo jump from Canadian soil and safety. And I don't aim to git in any furder."

"We gotta stand together."

Smith's toothless gums were going at a furious rate on his pinch of finecut.

"Don't you go to fighting these fouls, as ye call 'em, expecting me to pitch in and help you out because you hail from the States. I ain't taking no chances on getting hacked up and tooken to a hospital and questioned by the cops about a fight."

"Ain't intending to go fighting them," answered Leep testily. "All I want is to get away from here. This is the rainiest, coldest, lonesomest place I ever stopped at. I'm about to bust. Think of marooning those two American rum-runnin' boys on that other island!"

Leeper shuddered. The place was geting on his mind.

AT THIS moment the bony-faced Vike came through the brush from the hack. Smith muttered warningly and flitted away. Vike demanded help from Leep, and together they hauled out a deep-sea diving suit and all necessary gear from the hold beneath the long after deck.

This deck had a collapsible derrick rig and a mechanism for tilting the deck up at a stiff angle so that the cargo of liquor would slide over the stern into the water in case officers were closing in. Leep was chilled with fear that Vike and Zuanich would put that suit on him and send him down into the depths when they went for the rest of the liquor that night.

As it turned out, Vike himself went down, donning four thick suits of underwear to keep from chilling, and Leep was kept on top to haul inboard the netfuls of bottled stuff, hugging the net to him each time while the sea water ran down him in streams and his wet, numb fingers became bruised and raw from the hard, unpliable meshes and the rough burlap bags. And all the time Zuanich stood just inside the cabin door and bossed and jeered.

And Leep changed from a boy to a man through this ordeal. He longed to smash, and he told himself that one of these days he would get Zuanich in his hand and squeeze. So he grinned thinly and said not a word.

This silence was not entertaining enough for the humorously inclined hijacker, who had a propensity for boisterous fun.

"Why you not talk?" he demanded. "Your tongue was plenty long when you say you will sick the officers on us fouls—me and my four passengers."

Leep held his silence and his frozen grin.

"You no hear that maybe," Zuanich kept on. "Maybe you hear this: Purty soon we go back to camp with this stuff. Tomorrow night me and Vike take a load to Seattle and come back. If the coast is clear, the next night I take my four passengers and everybody else and go back to Seattle. I quit this island for good and get some new place to dodge the police.

"I take everybody," Zuanich continued in measured words, like a jungle cat creeping upon its prey, "everybody except one. You want to make trooble for me. So I maroon you on the island with no grub or matches or blankets. And I burn the shack. How you like dat, hey?"

But still Leep only grinned his thin and steely grin.

III

SLEEPER was afraid to be left on the island. Afraid of cold and hunger without blankets or fire or a shelter, afraid of the blowing winter storm and the endless wash-wash of the sea and the gray, hammering tides, and afraid of the loneliness and remoteness and strangeness of it all. He tried to think of a scheme to get away, but none seemed adequate.

In the end Zuanich himself unwittingly suggested something. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon of the third day. The hijacker had been to Seattle and back, finding the coast clear. They had eaten their last meal here. The whisky from beside the shack and the blankets had already been put aboard. And Zuanich, yawning luxuriously and patting a full and comfortable stomach, said he guessed he'd go down to the boat and go over the engine.

It popped into Leep's mind then what to do. Zuanich was joking, loitering, getting into his high-laced boots leisurely. It was three hours yet to dark and leaving time. Leep picked up a stack of tin dishes and carried them outside to a narrow board stuck up between two fir trees that was used for a washing place.

Then, outside, he sped for the *Sea Horse*. Only two or three minutes were required for him to unscrew the nuts and bolts that held the carbureter. He loved an engine though he had never had much chance at one. Zuanich loved them, too, and Leep knew that the hijacker would miss the carbureter the instant his eyes fell on the steel corral of horse powers.

The benefit Leep expected from his vandalism was vague. At best he would have a club to buy his passage from the island; at worst he would keep the gang with him and not be left alone.

With the mechanism under his arm he glanced furtively from the shadows of the engine room, and, not seeing any one around the bushes, he stepped swiftly to the shore and dropped the thing in the roily depths of a rainwater pool where an ebbing tide would not reveal it to frantic searchers. Then he returned to the house.

Zuanich came out going to the boat, grinning his humorous, gloating grin.

Leep had been currying favor with the cook by helping him to wash the tinware. He now proceeded with the old man at the makeshift bench, and when the utensils were hastily washed the two carried them in to the shack to dry and box. Then Zuanich plunged into the shanty like a mad bull.

"You—you—t'ief!" he howled, bobbing like a rubber man before Leep. "You steal de carb."

"What?" said Leep in mild surprize.

"De carbureter—t'ief! You know, you—you no-good Yank."

Leeper gazed at Zuanich so innocently and scanned the faces of the other men so intensely, as if to say, "What on earth is he talking about?" that Zuanich was thrown off the track. He flashed around on the gang, ready to accuse any man.

And the gang had such looks—startled fear, gaping mouths, the soft-eyed unreadableness of the Hindu, the bland blankness of the Chink, the surly glare of others—that even Leep himself thought for a moment that one of them must be guilty. But Zuanich turned back on Leep.

"Where's that carbureter?"

"Don't ask me," retorted the youth.

"Make him tell," advised Vike, coming forward, his lip lifting in a snarl, his hands outspread to clutch. "Twist him."

"I'll shoot him!" bellowed Zuanich, dragging out his gun.

"You do that fool thing," said a quieter voice, "and we'll stay here till we starve. A killed man can't talk."

"Twist him!" hissed Vike.

Zuanich wanted to do it. He was teetering desperately before Leep. But Leep stood relaxed and easy and unfaltering, and something in him, that racial sanctity and insulation that was personally his, kept Zuanich's fists off of him again.

In his desperation a way came to Zuanich, a trick for him to play. He eased down.

"Just a minute," he panted. "I fix him. No foolin' with twisting. That makes 'em brave."

He pulled out his big gold watch, snapped the lid open and looked at the time and at Leep.

"Fifteen minutes after two o'clock," he said. "When t'ree o'clock com if that carb ain't discovered I shoot you. How you like that, hey?"

Leep mustered his icy grin.

"I shoot your left foot, and in five minutes again I shoot your right foot, and in five minutes your left hand, and in five minutes——"

Zuanich gestured to indicate a continuous process and added:

"You've got t'ree quarters of an hour."

He snapped the watch shut and said conversationally to Vike:

"Twistin' makes 'em fight. Waiting makes 'em wilt. He took the carb sure. He come back wit' it by t'ree o'clock."

Zuanich sat down on his favorite box, pretending a great leisure. Smith went flitting outside to collect the odds and ends of kitchen utensils around the trees. Leep followed him.

"Zuanich is going to get rough pretty soon," he said whimsically to the old man. "Us Americans have got to stick together."

The wisp of a man turned on Leep with a fierceness beyond any apparent cause.

"Don't say 'us Americans' to me! Don't ye do it!"

"Zuanich needs to be singed," declared Leeper, fierce too all at once. "Him and the four foreigners, and I'm going to singe 'em!"

"Don't look to me for help, boy. I won't crook my little finger for ye. I—I——"

The old man was terribly shaken by some inward fear. Both were speaking in subdued tones. Smith kept on jerkily, his hands trembling, his voice running to high notes, though not loud.

"I—I don't dare help ye, boy. Don't dare get broke up er cut and tooken to a hospital. The officers would come a-askin' what happened here. They'd pry and probe and find out I've got a—record. Find out my name ain't Smith. You leave trouble alone, boy, and give me a chance to get back to Canada aud the North."

"But when Zuanich leaves here he's going to Seattle," protested Leep. "You get down into the U. S. whether or no."

"Touch and skip, that's all. Leave his lousy immigrants. Coal Harbor is Zuanich's hangout. He'll be at Vancouver by morning. Don't ye go troublin' trouble, boy, till old Smith's clear o' the border of the U. S."

"What you want me to do? Set mum and let him leave me here marooned like a goat on a roof?"

"What do I care for that? I mean, for an old man's sake——"

"Know what I'm going to do?" Leep broke in. "Gonna grab Zuanich's gun off o' him. That Hindu and that China egg and two or three more don't like Zuanich any more than I do, it looks like. Maybe they'll pitch in and help me."

"Oh—oh!" wailed the cook. "A reg'lar cuttin' and slashin'! I'm afeard of a knife. They cut and cyarve so almighty easy."

He made a sort of reminiscent gesture, like passing a blade back and forth.

They gathered up the odds and ends of the kitchen things, among them a butcher knife that the old man handled a bit awesomely, and carried them into the house.

Every eye glued itself on Leep as on a freak or a notable or a man about to reach an end. Their eyes made him cold. He forgot about grabbing Zuanich's pistol. He dropped a piece or two of the tinware in his confusion, and for an excuse to get out of the house he took up one of the boxes of utensils and went lugging it down to the launch. But when he had set it in the galley and faced returning to the shack his courage was water. He stood on the narrow board gangplank in the rain, sick from uncertainty.

But he had to go back. Had to act to save himself. He made up his mind abruptly what to do. He would go in; and, pretending to stoop over and whisper to Zuanich where he sat on the box, he would shove and upset the man and in the surprize snatch out the gun. If he failed the missing carbureter was still his safety bond, for Zuanich would not dare kill him until that was found.

Then he was saved the return to the house. Abruptly the hijacker and the gang came pouring from the shack through the fringe of brush and trees. Zuanich came with the short, quick steps of an angry man.

"You come down here," he charged suspiciously, "to do more funny t'ings to my boat."

He went on board, disappeared inside, came out again in a minute looking mollified at finding no further damage. He swaggered close to the Missourian.

"No more funny tricks," he warned. "I won't wait for t'ree o'clock."

In a flash Leeper resolved to taunt the man, get him off guard and dart in for the gun.

"What time is it now?" he drawled, his back muscles crawling at the closeness of danger.

Zuanich was not averse to telling. He looked at his big watch.

"Half past two," he answered. "Only half an hour left."

Leep took a step nearer.

"A whole half hour?" he cheeped airily. "Plenty, Zuanich."

Zuanich sensed a change. He was impatient instantly to know what it meant.

"You too fresh," he snapped. "For dat I dock you fifteen minutes. At a quarter to three I shoot. You got fifteen minutes left."

"Plenty o' time for you to sweat in, Zuanich."

"What?" Zuanich began to bounce again. "I dock you five minutes more, you—you——"

"Aw, be a sport, foreigner," scoffed Leep with offensive lightness. "Dock me ten minutes."

Something inside of Leeper was singing a song of triumph. Something racial and outside his comprehension. The gang was back a few yards in an ill drawn half circle. Time and opportunity for action were at hand.

"Ten it iss!" ripped Zuanich, his dark face redly flushed. "Five minutes more you got to find de carb."

"You're wasting time, king."

Zuanich was almost beside himself. His hands were jerking. Leep felt all knotted up inside. He squeaked out one more taunt:

"Why don't you pull your gun and shoot, you big hunk o' foreign fat?"

Zuanich's hands fell to his scabbard. Leep tensed to spring in—and a figure intervened. A high-voiced, screaching figure it was, with a butcher knife—Smith the cook.

"Git his gun, boy! Move, you king o' hijackers, and I'll rip ye! Git his gun!"

Smith had the point of the knife against Zuanich. In half a second of time Leep had whipped out the automatic pistol. Vike and two or three others were closing in. Together Leep and Smith got back a step or two. Leep fired a shot over the heads of the men, and another at their feet that sent up a splatter of mud and water.

"Hold back, ye alien dirt!" shrilled Smith, brandishing his knife. "I'll rip ye. I'm a knifer from Knifersville, I am!"

"Get your hands up!" barked Leep. "Get back, Zuanich!"

The men, hands up head high, startled, crowded back, not knowing what to expect.

"Us Americans had to stick together," Smith flung sidewise at Leeper. "Couldn't see ye goin' it alone. What's next, boy?"

"Get the bunch of keys off Zuanich." Leep's thought was moving swiftly.

The old man thrust the butcher knife between his toothless gums like a pirate of the old school and unhooked the key chain from the hijacker.

"Now," directed Leep, "unlock that safe in the cabin and throw all the guns and knives overboard."

"We ought to search them four immigrants," rumbled the old man as he went on board the launch. "They might be spies trying to get into our country."

"Our country" had a significant emphasis for Leeper's benefit.

"We'll 'tend to them," answered Leep grimly.

The dried-up wisp came out in a minute, with his butcher knife again clamped between his jaws and looking very fierce, and threw an armload of weapons into the water. Then Leep ordered that every man except Zuanich be locked in the cabin. There were growls and scowls at this and a chattering from the Chinaman, but under the black eye of Leep's gun they filed across the gangplank.

"Shame to lock up some of them boys," Smith said, a little drunk and maudlin from authority, and added sincerely, "There's a lot o' good foreigners in the world, boy."

"Sure," agreed Leep. "Must be quite a few. But they's five or six here that need fixing."

With ten men locked securely in the steel cabin, the two Americans set Zuanich to the task of fishing out the carbureter from the dirty pool, cleaning it and replacing it on the engine. As this job progressed Zuanich loosened his uneasy tongue. What was Leeper going to do? Where would he take the bunch? Eh? Run up to Vancouver and forget the little spat like a good feller? But Leep kept silent.

"You turn me in to the cops," asserted the hijacker, getting bolder, "I will tell about the Middy, Missouri, grand jury."

Leep went a shade white at this threat. When the carbureter was back in place he, looking pretty grim like a man highly resolved, ordered Zuanich to run the launch out into the channel. As they drew away from the land Leep gave final directions:

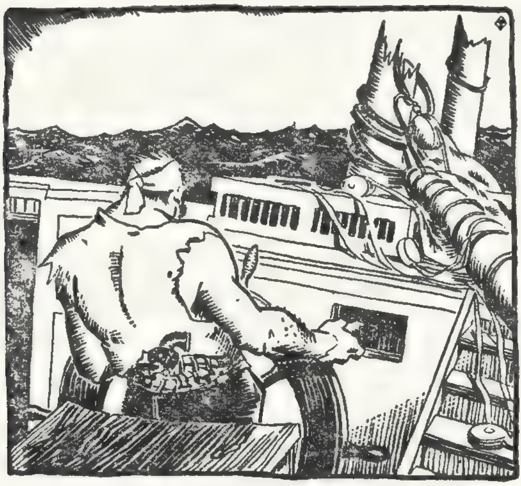
"Head for Seattle, Zuanich, and no tricks about getting there."

"Seattle! Fool, I tell the cops about you."

"You'll have a chance to all right," retorted Leep. "I'm going to turn you and Vike and these four immigrants of yours over to the officers if I go to jail in Missoury for a year. The rest o' the gang will be witnesses against you. You—" he turned to Smith—"I'll let you off some place where you can catch a boat back to Canada."

"Canada nothing!" snorted the old man. "Me, I'm headin' for home. All I ever done was to cyarve a couple of fouls—waiters in a rest'rant where I was cooking. Going back home and face it out with the law so's I can live again in the old U. S. It come to me a minute ago as a sudden notion. Foreigners is all right, but I'm tired o' being in foreign lands."

"Me too," said Leep as if from a world of experience. "No place like the old U. S. To Seattle, Zuanich, and no tricks."



The War Cats of Dugan O'Day

A Complete Novelette

by John Dorman

Author of "The Lantern on the Cow," "The Seven Who Went But Once, etc.

A TWO-INCH augur in "Dummy's" bunk, and the afterhold of the laboring bark *Blackfish* already full of water! A two-inch augur!

Very grimly Dugan O'Day glanced up from the half concealing blankets which covered all the tool but an inch of its wooden handle and twice as much of the twisted pod. But his blue eyes had no grimness when he met those of the man in whose bunk the augur lay—the bunk of Captain Whitmore Johnstone, called "Dummy" everywhere but to his face, because of a throat trouble which at times rendered him incapable of coherent speech.

Full of *aguardiente*, the captain was, and full of other things as well. Had he not owned the bark *Blackfish* he would long since have lost his berth aboard her.

A good ship, once, that bark, but at the moment Dugan took from the captain's hand a bit of paper she was little better than a derelict.

"What do you want?" was the message on the paper scrap.

"Look at the barometer," Dugan replied, walking to that instrument.

Rising rapidly. Silently he studied the convex end of the column of mercury, while behind him gibbering sounds came from the thick lips of Johnstone, who forgot that his dumbness was upon him. Ghastly sounds.

"If she opens a seam forward she'll sink like a hunk of lead," said Dugan reflectively, resolutely keeping his eyes from that telltale augur.

"Last night," continued Dugan, as the skipper nodded, "there was three feet of water in the well and the pumps refused to work."

There was more than that in the after hold. Bound from Philadelphia for Tampa, the *Blackfish* had caught the tail end of an autumn hurricane off the mouth of Tampa Bay. Warned by the falling glass, her dirty canvas had been taken in, but her rotten masts, even bared as they were, could not stand before the eighty or ninety mile wind.

At dusk of a Thursday the gale had struck them; half an hour later the mizzen went by the board, pounding a great hole in her side right between wind and water before it could be cut loose. At midnight the mainmast went, smashing one of the only two boats in its fall, but doing little other damage. Slowly the bark settled at the stern; slowly her stem raised toward the storm-blackened skies until it seemed, as she mounted wave after wave, that surely she would rear up and over, plunging down to her death.

But she floated, for the after hold was full of hard wood lumber. In the forward hold was rock ballast and farm machinery. If she opened a seam forward, or if the bulkhead broke—another ship gone; another crew to the port of missing men.

Again the captain took his pencil and wrote hurriedly—he had much practise at writing. Before the love of liquor had become so strong that it dispelled every other affection from this Johnstone he had made love a bit too violently to a dancing girl in a café on the mountain at Rio.

Striking like a wind-blown rope end, she had thrust a small stiletto in his throat, but he did not die. By the thousandth of an inch he missed that death, and from the wound grew the affliction which gave him his name of Dummy.

There were days when his rasping tones out-shrieked the gulls; there were also days when anger, fear, excitement, or too much liquor quite muted his harsh voice or turned it into squawking horror. Drunk, he was almost always dumb. The captain had a deal of practise writing!

The note he gave his mate read:

I shall inspect forward hold this morning. If doubtful, we abandon ship at once.

There was no trace of more than ordinary interest in Dugan's face, but he thought—

"With a couple of augur holes she'll be doubtful, most likely! She is, by the saints, very well insured, I'll bet!"

And she was, for several times her value. Five thousand would have been very dear for her, for nigh unto death was she when Dugan O'Day shipped at Philadelphia as her first officer. Her planking, once copper-sheathed to the water line, was rotten with worms and foul with barnacles and weeds in the spots where the copper was gone, and above the water line her sides were mostly paint. It is well known that old ships, like old women, require more of it than younger ones.

In the full brunt of the hurricane the old *Blackfish*, would not have lived an hour before she foundered. Caught where that wind blew even as much as two hundred miles an hour, and the waves would have been higher than her main yard! Lucky was she and her hard bitten crew that they caught only the edge of it.

With the hurricane over at noon Friday, they had lumbered on toward the coast of Florida, and in the eighteen hours from then until daylight Saturday, when Dugan O'Day went to the saloon to look at the glass, they made perhaps as much as a knot an hour; surely not more than two knots.

With a quiet, "Aye, sir," Dugan left the door of the skipper's cabin, passed through the saloon and out on deck.

A hoarse shout from the lookout aloft on the fore mast aroused him.

"Land, sir!" repeated the man, at his command. "Land! Dead ahead!"

Not that it mattered. Even thirty years ago many sea lanes converged in Tampa Bay. At the worst it would not be long before a ship sighted them. Nothing mattered much, for Dugan had been on duty forty-eight hours straight.

Vaguely he decided that the faint pencil line across the horizon which marked land would be all of thirty miles away, probably; then he turned to these and other thoughts:

"She is a good ship, except that she has been a better one, and she has a soul and a heart. Dummy'd scuttle her in a minute. Or some Cuban smack'll salvage her, —— it! I will, by the saints! I will!"

Also he remembered that his father, an able navigator and a man among men, had been all his life a mate and never once a captain. Dugan wished a better fate than that. And even at twenty-eight he had

had his master's papers for three years.

It would be a fine feather in his cap if he could turn the trick, and feathers of the sort a mate must have to be a captain. So, at least, thought Dugan O'Day.

"She is lower forward this morning," he said solemnly, to whoever might hear.

The bos'n caught the words, repeated them. Not a man of the crew had noticed it before, but muttered comments showed that they now agreed with the first mate.

"Mister," said Dugan to the second, a stripling youth with bulbous eyes and a taste for rum which rivaled that of the captain, "call the skipper."

The second passed the order to a sailor. And long before Dummy appeared Dugan was holding up to the gaze of the crew an improvised lead line whose lower five feet of length was eloquently wet.

The old man's step sounded behind him, and Dugan said musingly—

"Thirty miles to go—and she'll flounder in half that."

No need for the skipper's hurriedly scribbled order to abandon ship—no need at all. With one look at him the men were at the long boat, already stocked with water and casks of salt beef and biscuits, sliding it through the davits.

Dugan disappeared. Just as the last man of the crew of ten dropped down the line he came on deck again, holding one hand behind him. And the skipper babbled mangled sounds, beckoning him to hurry.

Calmly Dugan leaned against the rail and spoke.

"Have you not heard, captain, that blackfish go ashore to die? Saints willing, I'm a-goin' with this one!"

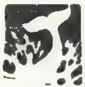
There is indeed a tradition of the coast which says that blackfish, mortally stricken, make all possible speed to the beach to give up life.

And Dugan drew that concealed hand out, to dangle over the rail in plain sight of the captain, the two inch augur.

Dummy arose, and his thick lips spewed forth sounds, little less than horrible. No fool, was Dummy Johnstone. Well enough he knew that something was very wrong, but the crew was slower witted.

Vainly he waved his arms; vainly he gabbled sputtering sounds, vainly he drew a pistol from his hip—the bos'n, at the helm, struck it out of his hand and overboard.

The lines were thrown off and the oars dipped water with a jerk that tumbled the captain in a heap in the stern. Then the boat was gone, a bobbing speck on the long swells.



"BLACKFISH," murmured Dugan O'Day whimsically, "go ashore to die—or so I've heard."

And the old men of the sea and coast swear that they do, saying that the blackfish is an animal which by accident has taken to the sea. They even swear that living blackfish will aid and guard a dying one on his last journey. Well named and poorly named is the blackfish. Even his belly is black, but he is a little whale, and by no means a fish.

Seldom, indeed, is a dead blackfish observed floating off shore, while dead and dying ones are frequently found on beaches. And it is solemn truth that a living blackfish is often seen in the shallows near where a wounded one lies on the sands—but they are gregarious by nature. Also it is true that they are not very numerous, so that a floating carcass might pass unnoticed at sea, while one stranded on a beach is likely to be seen.

All of which, of course, had little to do with Dugan O'Day's staying by the bark. The nearest he came to expressing a reason was this—

"She was a gallant ship, and I'd not have her scuttled to put coin in a —— limey's pocket."

English was Captain Johnstone, and a remarkable discredit to his race; Irish and Spanish was Dugan, and no particular discredit to either blood. Also with no love for Englishmen.

The long boat was a mere dot on the sunlit water when Dugan turned from her rail, aroused by a yawing of the unsteered vessel which turned her broadside to an extra large swell and sent a cascade of water over her waist.

Laboriously he brought her back to the course and lashed the wheel. Carefully he flattened the few rags of canvas—jib and flying jib, foresail and fore topsail—to the dying breeze. She kept steerage way, but little more.

Then he sounded the forward hold again. His trickery had impressed even himself. But there was in it only the three feet of water which had entered when the gale blew off a hatch cover. And then he slept by the wheel, wrapped in a dirty blanket, arousing almost every minute, it seemed, to strengthen the *Blackfish* out and set her on her course again.

She had indeed been a gallant vessel, that bark *Blackfish*, although the trade for which she had been built was as black as her name and the paint on her sides. Rusted leg irons stapled to the floor in both holds testified to that. Made to run slaves into the States, she had been, at a time—the fifties—when slave importing was long since illegal. Afterward she was one of the fleet of daring packets which bore the much needed drugs, food and mail from Havana to the beleaguered city of Mobile, until she was pocketed and captured by a squadron of Farragut's gunboats.

Then Johnstone bought her for a song at public auction—as government owned ships have always been sold—and made her an island trader. Even at that time she had the lines of a racing yacht. Her tall masts—cut down by a third afterward when they became rotten—raked like those of a corsair of Barbary. Her main royal yard was near twenty feel long as it lay on deck; aloft, it seemed a man could span it with his two arms. Even her belaying pins were mahogany, and her catheads were carved with the leaping figure of the little whale whose name she bore.

Again she yawed and turned her port rail to the waves, and Dugan awoke. By the sun it was noon and time he was up and doing. No rich prize for salvagers, that *Blackfish*, but yet one worth a few thousands, and one very easy to take, with the waves dying down to quiet swells and the port of Tampa only a few hours away. Must be up and doing!

Very thoroughly he rummaged the captain's cabin and his own for weapons. Three forty-five revolvers he found and thrust into his waist band. A very picture of a pirate was Dugan O'Day, with his week-old beard of golden-red, his huge, gaunt appearing frame, his bare feet, and a blood-soaked bandage around his forehead in lieu of a hat, for a falling block had scratched him there. And he swore like any pirate at the food he must eat. Salt beef, biscuits, and cold water!

Again he stood at the great wheel. Then he lashed it and sat on a cleat, resting and watching the brilliant sun playing on the canvas of some small sailing craft hull down to the eastward.

And then he was asleep. Perhaps two hours later he awoke, with the reek of fish in his nostrils, and in his ears the murmur of uncouth Spanish and the creaking of some craft whose side rubbed that of the *Blackfish*.

Bare feet pattered below him and cautiously he raised his head to peer down from the elevation of the poop deck. It was a Cuban smack, and four of her men were already aboard the bark. Voices of two sounded in the saloon below; two more lounged by the rail. And another Cuban on the smack was laying down a heavy cable.

Dugan arose and stood at the top of the companionway, saying nothing, while a squat, grossly fat man and a thin one emerged from the saloon. Apparently the fat one was the smack's captain.

Very silent, for a moment, and Dugan could hear the splashing of freshly caught fish in the well amidships of the smack. The man aboard that boat disappeared, and still the Cuban captain and the thin man with him conversed in low tones. And Dugan O'Day was enjoying himself immensely.

"The honor of this visit, *hidalgo*—to what is it entitled?" he asked in the sweetly flowing, limpid Spanish his mother had taught him.

A rank insult, that *hidalgo*, for a man so called is a nobleman of Spain. The Cuban was anything but that!

From infancy Dugan had thought in three languages. Born, he was, of a pale lily of a woman who had danced her way to fame on the stages of two continents before sickness and the love of Michael O'Day weaned her from her art. Bred, was Dugan, in the old French Quarter of New Orleans, almost within the shadow of the cathedral and with the smell of the market always in his snubby nose. And he had been named Juan Alvarez y Mario Patrick Dugan O'Day. His mother called him Juanito and taught him to play the castinets and dance; his father called him Pat and taught him to fight with his hands; he called himself Dugan, because he liked the sound of the name, Dugan O'Day, and taught himself many other things.

Quite naturally, then, he came to speak

in three languages and swear in two. Beautiful Spanish, bastard French, and English with a trace of Irish phrasing and a bit of the talk of the seas. Eventually he learned to swear in Spanish, but never was he adept at it.

Four Cubans turned instantly toward him; four Cubans froze into statues at the sight of the two guns in his hands.

"Catfish and gulls," said Dugan, "sight carrion no more quickly than you gentlemen of Cuba sight salvage." And directly to the captain he said, "I am disconsolate, your grace, that I can not invite you to luncheon, and that you must go so soon."

The captain awoke to a speech, but he kept his hands well away from the bare knife whose handle protruded from the waist band of his unbelted trousers.

"We shall lunch, señor, aboard my smack—after the line is fast." And he grinned with little show of fear.

"Mongrel curs!" cried Dugan, whose temper was fast going and whose Spanish was becoming better, "unnamed whelps of many fathers and vile mothers, get off my ship!"

Now, it is true that Cubans are more wont to make love than marriage, but no man likes to be told his parents were so forgetful.

From the shelter of the smack's low galley came a slithering ray of light; Dugan heard the whistle of the knife even as its heavy hilt struck his right elbow. Numbed for the moment, the pistol fell from his fingers—and he saw fish knives appear as if by magic in the hands of the four Cubans below him.

The fat captain's arm went back, and the gun in Dugan's left hand crashed twice. A spot of red seemed to leap from nowhere to fix itself on the Cuban's broad wrist. Lucky, very lucky, that one shot should have taken effect. Few men shoot well with both hands—and Dugan shot well with neither.

Then from the deck of the smack came whirling a heavy catfish club, a lead-loaded bit of black mangrove two feet long, kept to deal with sea cats, whose savage teeth and stinging feelers make them unpleasant things to handle. Dully the club thudded against the spokes of the wheel, having missed Dugan's head by inches.

Even as he shifted his eyes from the four Cubans below him to look for the one aboard the smack came another club, striking the pistol from his hand.

As if the fall of the weapon to the deck had been a signal, the Cubans surged up to the narrow companionway, with the unarmed captain in the lead. Dugan's left hand tingled, his right arm was still dull and heavy from the sharp blow on the elbow bone. Grimly he tugged at the pistol still in his waist band, but it had settled down inside his trousers and his fingers could not seem to close hard enough to draw it out.

At the very bottom of the 'way bunched the Cubans, hesitating, and the fat man set one foot on the first iron step. Very terrible looked Dugan O'Day, raw-boned man of iron muscle, with his bandaged head held high and his mouth thrown far open to emit a cry of rage.

Grimly he towered over them. Forgotten now was the pistol, and his great hands opened and closed as if they had never known numbness.

Another club whirled by him, so close this time that he felt the little breeze of it. Even as he dodged the *Blackfish* yawed sullenly so that a foot of water welled over her waist and poured on the low deck of the smack. And Dugan O'Day staggered awkwardly at the edge of the poop above the 'way.

Like the Cubans, he grasped for a hand hold, but he grasped too late. Summoning all his strength and poise, he was able only to steady himself long enough to spring rather than fall, selecting the fat captain for his landing place.

Handicapped by his wounded wrist in meeting the roll of the *Blackfish* and the surge of water which followed it, the Cuban had lunged blindly for a grip on the companionway railing. He missed, and the grotesquely outspread arms and legs of the leaping madman—for so Dugan must have appeared to the Cubans—enveloped him. The heavy body of the mate crashed him down to the deck and did not rise.

Dugan felt not even the slightest jar from the leap. Hardly had he ceased falling when he gathered his muscles and sprang for the smallest of the Cubans, a tiny fellow with a hideously pock-marked face. Very little, he was, weighing surely not more than a hundred pounds.

He had lost his knife in the excitement of the wash of water; he was so terror stricken that he could not even dodge when

Dugan leaped. By his two bare ankles Dugan seized him, and the Cuban's head cracked solidly against the deck as the yelling giant with the red-gold beard straightened up.

As if the little man had been a pound of lead at the end of a five foot string did Dugan swing him around his head. Laughing, yelling; ripe with the lust for battle.

Back before him shrank the two remaining Cubans, knives held up before their parted lips and wide eyes. As one man they glanced toward the smack, and almost as one man they leaped the bark's rail, to fall any way at all on the deck of the smaller vessel.

Still laughing, still swinging the little Cuban around and around his head, Dugan walked to the rail, directly opposite the livewell in the smack. With one great heave and a burst of mirth he loosed his grip on the bare ankles. A great splash from the well—and Dugan turned to other things.

The captain was getting up, gasping hard for his lost breath. Dugan swept up from the deck the loaded pistol that had been struck from his hand; picked up as well the knife the little Cuban had dropped.

"Up!" he commanded the groaning fat man. "Up!"

The Cuban clambered to his feet, and with pistol muzzle and knife point Dugan urged him to the side; made him climb upon the rail. He steadied the trembling fat man until the little smack swung up and nestled against the side of the bark.

"Jump!" yelled Dugan, hilariously, and he set the point of his knife a half inch in the greasy flesh. With surprizing power and willingness the captain jumped, and the splash in the well was even greater than before.

The other three had disappeared. Loudly warning them to stay out of sight, Dugan slashed the lines which held the vessels together. Slowly the dirty fishing craft drifted away.

"This," said Dugan, as he watched the smack make sail, "may be more than I expected, but welcome nonetheless—as the cat said when she found the mouse swimming in the milk pail. 'Twas the finest of fights while it lasted."

He was thinking, primarily, of the effort and risk involved in bringing the *Blackfish* safely into port or to a place where he could beach her.

Before dusk that evening he could distinguish the coast from the poop without using the glasses. It would be perhaps fifteen miles away. Still the breeze blew gently from the west; still the barometer heralded unfailing fair weather.

At ten the moon arose, and he could see white water on the beach, for the wind had freshened slightly and the tide was starting in.

Blind luck guided the *Blackfish* through the bars, for Dugan O'Day was a deep sea sailor and not wise in distinguishing channels by slight variations in the color of the water and trifling differences in the breaking of the waves. But it was a fairly straight and rather broad channel, and he struck it just at the crest of high tide.

Straight through Pasquil Pass went the *Blackfish*. Just inside the pass the channel ended in the one which went north and south behind the islands. Of this Dugan O'Day knew nothing, but steered straight on.

Very gently the *Blackfish* rubbed her keel into the mud. At low tide there was some ten or twelve feet of water over the bar where it breasted the deeper channel; at high tide a couple more. Far up into the shallower water went the stem of the bark, raised as it was by the submerged stern.

Driven on by the force of the tide and the west wind, and by her own little momentum, the *Blackfish* crept in jerks up into the mud. Then, with a tortured shriek, the wavering foremast fell, tangling in the bowsprit and hanging over the water.

And Dugan O'Day slept peacefully in the saloon. The *Blackfish* had come ashore to die, if die she must, and part of his will was done.

IN THE gray light of dawn he awoke, having been asleep not more than two hours.

Almost savagely he hailed the fishing skiff whose coming had awakened him. A tall, black-bearded man in the bow held a long sculling sweep; a youth crouched on a thwart in the stern.

But his anger faded before the mild voice of the fisherman. After all, it was no more than human nature to visit a wreck. So the two came aboard, squatting against the rail and listening raptly while Dugan talked.

The sun arose, a great orb of gold, painting the water of the bay with a score of vivid tints; casting a gentle romance over the village on the mainland, which came afterward to be called Corlon; softening the harsh gray of its unpainted buildings and shroud-like nets on spreads into hazy purple wonder. But the three had no eyes for that.

Warmed by food and coffee the fisherman had brought, in case there were hungry men, all the Celtic and all the Castilian love of the dramatic arose in Juan Alverez y Mario Patrick Dugan O'Day. Vividly he enacted the deception with which he had driven Dummy Johnstone and his crew of sea scum from the vessel; even more vividly he enacted the fight with the Cubans. But Dugan failed to explain that when he had felt the weight strike planking he had lowered the line another two feet. A very false sounding—very!

Three pistols and a bare knife were in his belt; the bloody bandage swathed his blond head, and he strode the deck of the bark like any Kidd or Gasparilla—or any small boy playing pirate. No actor ever loved the limelight better than Don Dugan.

Th spell of his acting permeated even the reticence of the stolid, mild spoken fisherman, and he stole a page or two from Dugan's book of vaunting rhetoric.

"I reckon you played a man's part, mister," he said, "but you won't keep her."

Dugan abruptly stopped his striding. What heresy was this? Had he not saved the bark once by strategy and once by force? Would he not save her again if needs be?

The fisherman arose, to give freer play to his rough eloquence.

"She is a menace to navigation, this *Blackfish*, for her stern hangs out by ten feet into the channel. The channel here is very narrow; not more than a hundred yards wide. There is no room, you see, for as much as a skiff to pass. Or it may be that she is a derelict, adrift on the high seas.

"And I reckon it don't matter. Any court of admiralty will take the word of the tug captain who pulls you off and tows you into Port Tampa."

Squaring his sparse shoulders, stroking his beard, the fisherman climbed to the poop and peered down. Returning, he said:

"She is in the channel by seven feet, which is enough. And it wouldn't matter if she was in my garden. As long as a steam tug can pull her off at any high tide she is a menace to navigation. And as she lays she is a mighty easy prize to salvage, mister, a mighty easy prize."

"This," said Dugan reflectively, "is the coast of the civilized United States, where there is law and order."

"This," said the fisherman, "I reckon, is the coast of Florida. Law and order extend seven and a half miles around each city. After that the man with the most witnesses wins in court and the man with the most guts wins out of court. Possession, mister, is more than nine points on the coast of Florida. Unto them who hath shall be given, and unto them as ain't got——"

But Dugan was not listening.

"This," he said presently, "is my ship and I have beached her for repairs. Does that make any difference?"

"It might, if you can make Jupe Barnard and his kind believe it, but I don't guess you could."

"Who and what," asked Dugan, "is Jupe Barnard?"

"Owner of the steam tug *Henry B.*, and a wizened little rat. No boatman, either, and his crew is little better. He has salvaged more than one boat which didn't exactly need it. Between times he's a smuggler."

The bearded fisherman and his silent son departed at length, and Dugan was lost in thought.

Occasionally he returned the hail of a passing small boat; occasionally he stowed a bit of plug tobacco in his mouth. And by noon he had it! Dugan was himself again, and jauntily he strode the deck.

"Rats, eh, rats? Dogs and cats fight 'em. I have heard of dogs of war, but I shall make me some cats of war, because I have not heard of them and it is a good name. Dogs bark and run; cats spit and strike. War cats is the name!"

War cats *was* the name. To this day, and it has been thirty years, the old men of the coast speak of the "War cats of Dugan O'Day" and not of "The wreck of the *Blackfish*," as they speak of the wreck of the *Mildred* and a hundred other craft.

His restless striding carried him by the stump of the mainmast, clustered around which were six drums of kerosene, remnant of the deck load of some two dozen drums.

For five minutes he stared at them.

Then he ripped the knife from his belt, slashed the lashings which bound the drums, and laughed. Three drums he rolled to the port rail and three to the starboard; from the carpenter's chest he brought a wrench and loosened the screw plugs until they turned readily in his fingers.

He returned to the plans for his cats. Dim memories of school days in New Orleans came to him; memories of plates in histories which pictured war machines of the Romans, machines for hurling huge masses of rock or mighty spears. Names escaped him, but it didn't matter.

Throwing off the afterhatch covering, he drew out piece after piece of ash and hickory planking. Selected lumber, it was, billed to a wagon works in Tampa. With the lowering of the tide the water had drained off so that it bothered him not at all.

Until an hour of sunset, equipped with more tools from the carpenter's chest, he sawed and hammered mightily. Then he found a hacksaw and a cold chisel and fell to work cutting ten foot lengths from the anchor chain. Slow work, of course. Passing small boats spoke to him, but he answered not at all, or at most very shortly. Rather a one-track mind had Dugan O'Day, and he was given to throwing all his energy into one thing at a time. All his energy, either mentally or physically, was rather more than the ordinary, too.

In the light of the setting sun he strained and labored with a block and tackle and Spanish windlass, and by dusk three cats were ready to spit and strike. Dugan looked at his work and called it good.

Fitfully he dozed that evening and night, sitting bolt upright on the poop, arousing to every splash of a leaping mullet and every cry of a suddenly awakened gull. Once a pompano struck the side below him, and for thirty minutes he searched the sea with night glasses. Very firm-fleshed is the pompano, king of food fishes; his body strikes wood with the thump of a brick. Dugan had as yet much to learn of the ways of the Florida coast.

Monday dawned with all the brilliance a day may begin, and at sunrise Dugan was again at work, hammer and tongs. Visitors in plenty, that day, for the story of the *Blackfish* had spread, but except for the black-bearded fisherman Dugan kept them all off. He mistrusted them; since time was there has been between shipwrecked mariners and inhabitants of the coast, at best, only armed truce.

NEAR dusk, when the naphtha launch appeared, a dozen of the cats in all were done, nine lining the starboard rail, which lay quartering toward the pass, and three assembled on the poop.

Dugan sat on a cleat, watching the gorgeous colors of the sunset, when the faint popping of the exhaust of an unmuffled naphtha engine came to his ears. Forerunner of the gasoline launch was the naphtha burner.

Louder and louder grew the sound, and then he saw the craft in the pass, making slow headway against the outgoing tide. It halted fifty yards from the *Blackfish*. Evidently the men in the launch had heard tales.

"*Blackfish* ahoy!"

"Launch ahoy, and stay where you are," returned Dugan.

"You are Dugan O'Day, first mate?" questioned the man standing in the bow of the launch.

In the gathering dusk Dugan could barely see him.

"And if I am?"

"I am from the Atlantic and Pacific Marine Insurance Company. We are willing to consider your salvage claim on the *Blackfish*. My tug will pull her off at high tide tonight."

The voice was neither that of a seaman nor a man of the coast. And not a pleasant voice, by any means.

"You are willing to consider what?" asked Dugan.

"Your salvage claim," returned the launch's spokesman. "——'s bells, man, don't you know that anybody who saves a wrecked vessel has a salvage claim? Or did you think you could keep her for a play house?"

"You," said Dugan pointedly, "may be from St. Peter's pearly gates, but you can go to ——! Or try to board my play house, if you think you can handle my toys."

The launch fell away a little, apparently for a consultation, nor did the men aboard her seem to notice that the water between them and the *Blackfish* grew strangely calm, as if oil had been poured upon it.

Dugan emptied one drum, then another, and another, and there was only a glassy, lazy swell between the bark and the launch when next the man spoke, for the tide carried the oil straight out to the naphtha burner.

"This," said the voice, "is deliberate thievery, O'Day. We would be within our rights if we boarded you by whatever means may be necessary."

"This," said Dugan, "is thievery, but none of mine. By the time I count ten you will turn around and go, otherwise you will wish you had."

No answer from the launch, but just as Dugan said "One" the man at her engine hooked her up, heading her straight for the *Blackfish*.

Dugan counted no more. Leaping quickly to the shelter of the mainmast stump he touched a match to an oil-soaked torch of wood and sail cloth. Only his arm appeared in view as he threw it out on the kerosene covered water. Only his arm, that the torch light might not make him a target for lead. And he laughed.

As the torch struck the surface of the glass-like bay great gorgeous flames shot up. Kerosene in those days was potent with gasolene, because of careless distilling.

A wall of flame rushed to meet the white launch; a lesser wall came back to flicker a moment against the hull of the *Blackfish*. A taste of hell, and a supernatural thing, that a torch thrown into water should ignite it; should make the bay a seething caldron of red-gold fire with billowing clouds of smoke!

Three figures in the launch shrank back in terror; a pistol in the hand of one of them exploded.

Twenty, thirty feet into the still night air soared the quick fire. In the space of a breath it covered an area of many hundred square yards, and in the center was the launch.

Flames engulfed her; flames blackened her white sides; flames licked at her canvas awning.

A rope end caught; the awning caught. Then the flames on the water died with the suddenness they had been born, and frantic hands aboard the launch beat at the burning rope; tore at the canvas and threw it overboard.

The motor had stopped, and Dugan listened to the avid cursing of the trio; listened to the hiss with which burning canvas met water. And the surf boomed dully from beyond the islands.

Wild laughter, rising high above that surf roar, high above the voices of the men on the launch, high above the screaming of the startled gulls. Wild, eerie laughter from the dark deck of the *Blackfish*. Dugan laughed as he did all else; his heart was in it, and his lungs were very good.

Abruptly he stopped and listened to the savage efforts to start the engine; no more heart had they for boarding the bark! Then it sputtered and caught; sharply the launch veered off and headed for the pass.

And Dugan's barbaric laughter sounded forth once more; the pine woods on the mainland returned it in echoes whose volume seemed scarcely less than the original. Many a woman in the village a mile away shuddered at the sound, for the evening was very still.

The laughter died, the echoes died, the gulls and pelicans and cormorants returned to their sleeping places on low sand bars, but Dugan O'Day made coffee on the tiny stove he had set up in the saloon—the bearded fisherman had brought it as well as other things—and waited. For the popping of the naphtha launch's engine had not grown fainter and fainter until it merged at last into the mellow beating of the surf. Instead, it stopped abruptly not so very far from the pass. A man to notice little things, this Juan Alvarez Dugan O'Day.

At midnight the moon, being in the last quarter, peered above the fringe of pines behind Hell's Kitchen, a broad, shallow basin of water adjacent to the bay. Hell's Kitchen, because the prodigious number of shell fish and horseshoe crabs therein brewed many a weary hour for net fishermen. The wind had long since died; the tide turned, as a tide should, at moonrise.

Dugan walked among his war cats, shifting this one and that one, admiring them immensely, fervently requesting that the saints grant him cause to use them. And marvels of ingenious simplicity and potential force they were indeed. It remained to be seen if they worked.

The base of each machine was a great T of planks, and at the point where the long arm of the T joined the top of it an upright was set, in each case a twelve foot two-by-twelve of hickory, secured with blocks, braces, and stays to the base. And each machine was loaded with a ten-foot section of chain, looped around the upright, drawn hard back, and secured to a cleat on the base with two lines, one to each end of the chain. The touch of a keen knife across those lines, and the cat would spit forth the iron links with tremendous violence, for in loading them Dugan had multiplied his own great strength many times by means of his windlass and pulleys. Small wonder the natives in the passing boats had gaped at them!

Slowly the pale crescent of the moon mounted into the heavens; higher surged the tide. And while that moon lacked yet some thirty minutes of the zenith came the steam tug *Henry B.*—it was morning before Dugan learned her name, of course—with never a light showing, but with a faint rim of red around her low funnel that marked her well for what she was.

Almost ghost-like she slipped through the pass, and the moonlight silvered the curl of water from her dark bows. Ominously silent, she came up the channel; no hoarse whistle, no hail; even though she stopped less than a hundred yards away there was no hail.

"I," mused Dugan O'Day, "am about to be salvaged—maybe."

He studied the low, squat craft through his glasses. Right up in her bow two men were standing, and it seemed that one of them held a long black thing which might well have been a rifle.

Dugan watched the water eddying away from the tug's slowly reversing propeller as she held her position against the tide. A moment more, he was certain, and a boat bearing a cable would leave her side.

Should he wait? . . . He didn't. He was only twenty-eight, which is not so old, and already he had waited several hours for this tug to appear.

Flat on the deck he crawled up to one of his machines, knife in his teeth. Very quietly he moved the base of the ungainly thing until it lined with the pilot house on the tug. He placed the knife blade, whetted to razor keenness, against the lines; both must be cut exactly at once.

Suppose the tug was lightless by accident, instead of intention? Suppose she was not the near pirate he thought her to be? . . . Best be sure.

"Tug ahoy!"

A BURST of rifle fire, spattering bullets all about him, was his answer. And Dugan laughed, without noise. A quick slash, and two feet from the deck went Dugan O'Day, for he had been lying directly across the base of the machine. He fell solidly, but still laughing.

Even above the clatter resultant from the sudden releasing of the hundreds of pounds of force he had pent up in the thing of hard wood timbers he heard the savage shriek of the chain through the air; heard it clash against metal, and men's voices swearing.

He lay on his stomach and laughed, noiselessly. The chain had gone high of the pilot house, but it had wrapped itself around the funnel! No need for glasses to see the result. Flames from the stack itself showed that the upper half at least was gone.

Not so bad! But he must lower his front sight a trifle on the next one and cave in the front of that wheel house. Since each machine was built and loaded exactly alike he could change the elevation only by blocking up one end or the other.

He remembered several pieces of planking which lay where he had been at work; slowly he crawled to get them. For one brief instant he hesitated at the edge of a moonlit patch on the deck; then he plunged boldly across it—and a bullet whined above his head!

He must work faster! Quickly he grasped the needed blocking and began his return to the row of machines, wiggling and crawling, avoiding every patch of light.

No more bullets, and he could not distinguish any human form aboard the tug. But they would be in the pilot house, probably. Lucky for him they had no searchlight—they were not common then.

Still no sign of activity aboard the tug. Apparently they were waiting to see if he could fire ten foot lengths of anchor chain at will.

Dugan had no hesitation this time. Quickly he raised the rear end of one machine and slipped two pieces of planking under it; deftly he slashed the rope.

Again more than a hundred pounds of iron links wailed through the air, but this time the chain did no damage. He had raised his machine too high, and the missile glanced off the bows of the *Henry B.* Another burst of bullets from what was evidently a repeating rifle of heavy caliber, but the man behind it shot at random; Dugan was lost in the shadow of his cats. Lead thudded against the hull and the timber of the machines but no shot even came near him.

No blocking at all shot too high, four inches of it sent the chain too low, so therefore but one block went under the next machine to be discharged. It should sweep the deck but it didn't. He must have severed one rope a bit ahead of the other for the chain went wide of the mark.

Carefully he leveled the fourth weapon; carefully he drew the knife across the strained rope. The chain howled and whistled; glass tinkled and wood groaned as the iron links struck squarely against the front of the pilot house. But never a man on the tug raised his voice; never a rifle spoke in answer.

Among his engines of destruction lay Dugan, wrinkling his forehead in perplexity, twisting his lips into queer lines in his wondering.

Where in —— were those men? What in —— were they doing?

So lost was he in thought that he hardly noticed the moon sinking into a bed of clouds in the west, so that he could no longer discern more than the outline of the tug.

A great fish splashed water, seemingly about midway between the vessels, yet somewhat southward of a direct line between Dugan's position in the waist and the *Henry B's* bow. A very queer fish, too. It swam slowly, just under the surface, for several yards; then it broke water again; sank again, and the movement of its body was vaguely traced by the weird greenish glow of phosphorescence about it.

Another fish, and another. Then Dugan O'Day cleared his forehead—all but laughed. He knew now what sort of fish they were! Men, of course, from the *Henry B.* Going to come around the *Blackfish* and surprize him! Probably each had a pistol; a slight immersion in salt water wouldn't by any means prevent the firing of one, provided the ammunition was of first quality.

Oil! That was the thing. More oil. The tide had started out; it would spread the stuff toward them. But no, that wouldn't do. They'd escape by diving until the wall of flame had passed.

Lead, then—and the saints be thanked for the dimming of the moon which had brought out the phosphorescence and enabled him to see them in the water!

He glided along the deck, face set grimly, a pistol in either hand. No killing, of course, if he could help it, although doubtless the swimmers had orders to dispose of him as they saw fit and feasible.

Very calmly he leveled the pistol and fired at the foremost patch of greenish fire. The bullet splashed a foot ahead of it, and the man dove deeper.

"Lively, my lads," muttered Dugan, "or tomorrow the sharks will get lead poisoning. Will you be going?"

He punctuated his unheard remarks with lazy discharges of the revolver; two more bullets skipped from the water's surface a yard or so from the nearest swimmer.

Suddenly those men in the water seemed to realize how plainly their position was marked; as suddenly they turned for the tug. But they forgot that under water they would be safe from the bullets, which at the angle would glance off the surface. Making no pretense of concealment they swam frantically back the way they came to the sheltering lee of the *Henry B.* And two guns of his three Dugan emptied in hastening them along.

The boom of the heavy weapons had not yet ceased echoing when they were gone. A faint breeze stirred the fallen mainmast where it balanced over the bowsprit. Another breeze seemed to rock it gently—and that time Dugan noticed that the water was unruffled.

Straining his eyes he could barely make out a dark lump on the mast, a lump which seemed to be vaguely moving. There could be no doubt of what it was; one of the men, he knew, had gained the bow of the *Blackfish* before he noticed their movements; had climbed to the mast by the trailing lines.

Blood heated Dugan O'Day's blond face and rattled his usually level head; blood of anger, hatred of the cool, insolent daring of the man. A fool, he was, and all the men of the *Henry B.* were fools, to risk so much for salvage which would not net them over eight or ten thousand dollars, ship and cargo both.

Only long afterward—for each man who knew the reason had shared in the illusion, and hated to speak of his folly—did Dugan find that his actions had aroused a suspicion in the minds of the fishermen that the bark carried a cargo far more precious than fine hardwood lumber and farm machinery.

Some said gold in bullion, some said ambergris picked up at sea, some said pearls, and all said treasure. Any man in his senses would have known that such a rotten old hull as the *Blackfish* would not likely be trusted with bullion. But men with the treasure lust are not in their senses, and to them all things seem possible.

Dugan jerked the one remaining loaded pistol from his belt; savagely he squeezed the trigger, time after time. Five, six shots, and the hammer clicked more than once on empty cylinders before he realized that the last shot had been fired.

Hardly did he notice that after his first shot jets of flame spurted from the black lump on the mast and that bullets whistled by him; hardly did he notice that the moon was out again; only saw that his lead had all gone wild.

Opening his lips in one almost unearthly yell of rage, Dugan O'Day sprang upon the butt of the prone mast and prepared to charge the crouched figure. And Dugan O'Day for once failed to conquer by his sheer ferocity and reckless courage.

Even as his feet set on the mast the man arose, and the moonlight gleamed on a long knife in his hand. Moonlight, too, gleamed on the white teeth in his laughing mouth.

Suddenly Dugan remembered the fish knife in his belt. Eagerly he drew it and advanced along the trembling mast.

Dagger met fish knife, and sparks ground from the twain. Dugan's antagonist seemed a mulatto, standing nearly as tall as O'Day himself, and being far broader, with arms which hung to his knees.

No knife fighter, was Dugan O'Day, and he faced a man who was. Inch by inch the laughing, jeering negro forced him back along the mast. Down to the deck he drove him, and back—back—back. Ever the dagger drew circles of light before Dugan's straining eyes.

Dimly he saw, presently, that the tug had witnessed the fight and was coming in. She was less than fifty yards off when she halted again, and the rifleman took a hand in the combat. With solemn cadence his weapon spoke, but, because he was afraid of hitting the mulatto and because the moon is the poorest of lights for shooting, he missed consistently.

Back past the stump of the mainmast went Dugan, back almost to the saloon scuttle. ——! would it never end? or would it end all too soon, with that flashing dagger in his ribs?

With his broad shoulders, ape-like arms and long knife the grinning mulatto had a foot more reach than had Dugan. Too unequal to last, and slowly Dugan knew that it was a miracle that he had so long withstood the other's onslaughts. Still the rifle spoke deliberately; still bullets whined by Dugan's ears. And more than once he flinched from them.

The black grew even bolder; time and again he leaped in recklessly, and Dugan saved himself only by his dancer's nimbleness in dodging. Several times that slithering knife touched his shirt, and three times it marked his arm.

Then it ended. Writhing to evade one of those murderous thrusts, Dugan felt his foot catch in something, and he toppled headlong to the deck.

He saw the long arm sweep above him; heard the rasping of the man's breath. Still that rifle spoke. Could it be the marksman had mistaken the man who fell? For the bullets now lisped softly around the muscular negro's body.

The man faced the tug, waving his arms violently and opening his mouth to yell a warning—a warning that died unspoken. There was a soft little thud, a dull, dry thud. Queerly the arms dropped; silently the man relaxed in a sprawling heap, his head touching Dugan's feet. For a bullet had entered his gaping jaws.

And the *Henry B.* was not thirty yards away.

Summoning every ounce of will and courage, Dugan leaped to his cats. Full time they hissed and struck again. Almost madly he thrust blocking under the rear end of one of them, veering it around to cover the tug in her new position. The rifle for the moment was silent.

Thirty yards. At that distance, and aided by the former experience, he could not miss. The wailing chain struck hard against the already battered pilot house. There was a scurry of feet on the tug, raised voices, and another burst of rifle fire.

Another chain and another. One struck solidly against the forward Sampson post, doing no damage. One carried away a bit of the rail. Each time Dugan, sitting on the end of the base, was tossed off the deck—and he laughed.

Another and another, hissing through the air to thump against metal or stout planking. With every cat on the main deck sprung, Dugan flung himself down on his stomach to present a smaller mark to the rifleman, for slowly the *Henry B.* was backing off.

Then he raced to the poop, for the tug was turning around. Carefully he estimated, trained one of the cats and blocked it. Just as the tug steadied, with her stem pointed quartering away from the *Blackfish*, and the water boiled under her stern as the propeller turned forward again, he fired.

Metal clanged and grated against metal for an interval; there was the water-dulled sound of something breaking. Dugan leaped, he laughed, he shouted with glee. For helpless on the slowly ebbing tide floated the crippled *Henry B.* His last shot, by the grace of the saints, had broken her propeller!

For a minute or so she kept steerage way, then she seemed to turn broad side on to the current at the mouth of the pass, and Dugan heard the splash of her anchor, dropped to keep her from grounding. Quietly she swung around until her bows pointed straight toward the *Blackfish.* She was, perhaps, a hundred yards away.

Descending from the poop, Dugan stumbled over the sprawling body of the mulatto, and for a moment he debated a fine joke. He would pick the body up, load a cat with it, and return it whence it came!

Quickly he knelt and grasped the still warm corpse. It wilted and slid from his hands. Desperately he struggled with it, forgetting in his lust to conquer the thing with brute force what little he knew of handling men in that condition. Minute after minute.

Gasping and panting he sat on deck, wondering how he could rig a block and tackle to hoist the body to a cat on the poop. He was a man of one idea.

But in the end he had to be content with casting the mulatto overboard.

Calmer, then, he reloaded half a dozen of the cats with chains he had ready for the purpose. He found and reloaded his pistols. Just as day was breaking, and in spite of his firm resolve to stay awake, he fell asleep.

And, as had happened almost every time he tried to sleep, a hail awakened him when it seemed he had hardly closed his eyes. The sun was barely an hour high.

THE hail came from a smartly dressed man in the bow of another steam tug.

"East and West Insurance Company," said the man, as Dugan came out in sight. "I've come to take care of this *Blackfish.*"

"And you're welcome, sir, you're welcome. It's a —— of a job I've had taking care of her."

Then he laughed softly. Suddenly he had remembered that he had made no plans for the ultimate disposal of the bark; hadn't even thought of it! He'd been too busy saving her and keeping her to waste any time wondering over what he'd do when he had her safe.

A tender put out from the side of the tug, carrying two sailors and the insurance man. At the landman's command the oarsmen clambered aboard first. And Dugan laughed again as he observed that the well dressed man kept both hands in his coat pockets, which bulged greatly.

With finger and thumb he drew the pistol and knife from his belt, laying them on deck. Only then did the insurance man board.

"My name is Green, Mister O'Day. I'm authorized to tell you that if the cargo is in good shape and the ship capable of repair, which seems likely, that my company will give you a reward of a thousand dollars for your efforts."

"They save ten times that, and I did all the work," said Dugan, whimsically, "but it's all right."

Green smiled.

"We'll want a statement from you regarding her condition before the storm, and you may possibly have to appear in admiralty court. Dummy Johnstone is in Tampa swearing all over little pieces of paper that she was as sound as a dollar and that she sank ten minutes after he left her."

He waited a moment, seeming to choose words.

"The fishermen talk of treasure aboard her, O'Day, although there was one who said you saved her for sentimental reasons."

Very plainly Green was wondering just why he had saved her.

"For sailing ships, Mr. Green," said Dugan, musingly, "I'm as full of sentiment as the ocean is of fish. But I will admit that I had in mind a possibility of a reward, and I was thinking it might help me to get a captaincy. I've my master's license in sail."

"It might, and maybe we can help you. We'll see that the big navigation companies insured with us hear of you. We'll see. And what in —— do you call those things?"

He waved a white hand toward the machines lining the rail.

"Those," said Dugan, laughing, and very proud, "are nameless, except that they are inventions of my own and I have called them war cats, because they spit and strike like drunken women, and because I have never heard of any war cats."

Slewing one of the engines around so that the unleashing of its heavy chain would be no harm he demonstrated the method of operation.

"Fishermen," said Green, "told me something of them, although none liked the sound of lead flying well enough to come to see them in action. Also they said that you drove off a mess of Cubans, that you burned oil all around Jupe Barnard's brand new launch, and that you and these war cats were responsible for the *Henry B.* being where she is, and with a broken wheel." Wheel is coast parlance for propeller.

He waved his hand at the battered tug. Evidently the anchor had dragged, for the vessel was aground beside the pass. Dugan noticed it for the first time, then listened as Green continued:

"And they tell me Jupe said he was from my company, or some company. Why did you fight him off and welcome me?"

"He came to me," said Dugan, calm satisfaction written deeply in his smile, "asking if I was first mate of this *Blackfish* and telling me of the thousands of dollars salvage I was going to get."

Barnard had hinted, rather than spoken of the sum of the salvage—but Dugan was never one to quibble over little points of that nature.

"Men of the sea get salt horse and hard bread, dirty beds and dirty masters, but they get no salvage for saving ships on which they are regularly articled. The salvage a sailor gets, Mr. Green, will be no more than the edging ripped from the land lubber's velvet at any time." Which, of course, is very nearly true—ask any seafaring man.

He continued:

"I think, Mr. Green, that just now I'll not bother you to help me with a captaincy, thanking you very much, sir, but I'll take your thousand dollars and become a fisherman."

Gravely he gazed out on the broad waters of the gulf, sweetly blue in the light of a smiling day. Then he smiled, and said:

"Also, would it not be a very good plan to salvage the *Henry B.?* She lies in the pass and is a menace to navigation. 'Tis a fair day, and your tug could tow us both. And we have more guns and more witnesses than has Barnard."

Green laughed, struck his thigh, and laughed. Dugan's share of the sorely used tug's salvaging was a hundred dollars, even, nor was there a bullet fired.

The Grotesques of N'gibbidi

by T. Samson Miller

Author of "Obei," "Niger Witches," etc.

THE accommodation of the Niger River steamers imposes one sweeping division of voyagers—upper decks for whites, lower for colored—or it was unlikely that Bill Roach would have been mixing the smoke of his old Kanembu pipe with the aroma of the selected Havana of Sir Samuel Mons. For Roach, if the tales of the trading stations came anywhere near the facts, had poached much ivory from the sphere of influence of the Royal Sokoto Company, whereas Sir Samuel's name had appeared in the last list of King's Birthday Honors, thanks to his predominance in the tin fields of Northern Nigeria.

The extremes of scallywaggism and plutocracy were marked in Roach's khaki rags and his mosquito-bitten, hard-featured face under the close-cut sun-bleached hair, and the stoutish, assured financier, immaculate in the white mess dress of the tropics.

Imagine, then, the amusement among our little home-going crowd of traders, officials and missionaries when Roach barked from his corner of the smoking-room that he would block Mons from grabbing the rich tin deposits of N'gibbidi, and keep out the R. S. C., too.

"You nor the Company will muss up N'gibbidi whilst I'm above ground," were his words.

Mons half turned his round dark head to the speaker with amused inquiry, which ended in a significant arching of his thick brows. A touch of sun, or a poor fellow gone looney on the solitudes and hardships, or a scallywag got to thinking he was another *Emperoro* of the Sahara because a few village chiefs had knelt to him and thrown dust on their heads.

Perhaps. But Africa holds many strange mysteries, and Roach's knowledge of the western bulge in the pear of Africa, widely designated as "Negroland," was said to be uncanny. It was said of him he could "think black," as we say of those who know the involved mental processes and illogicality of the blacks. For myself I wondered if his fiat to Mons was to be disdained. I had something to go on.

Years before the discovery of the tin fields which awakened the Pagan Belt out of the cannibalism, fetichism and the G-strings of the slumbering primitive, to derbies and trousers, corsets and dragging gingham skirts, pneumonia and harmonicas Roach had penetrated the N'gibbidi country.

I was at the time a proud youngster in my first months as a full-fledged agent of the R. S. C., being in charge of the N'gua station on the Upper Niger. Roach came in one day with a Kroo follower—a giant whom he had dubbed "Tiny"—and a single barter pack. He was going to the Pagan Belt, then hostile or "closed" country, with this single barter pack and no weapon.

"Only government jackanapes tote guns," he had scoffed.

Naturally he had not taken an officer of the company into his confidence, but I overheard Tiny say hopefully—

"Dis time we get dat ting—fortune, marsa."

But they were back in two moons, pretty well used up, and with no evidence of that thing, fortune. On the strength of a few favors done the fortune seeker I asked him if his venture had realized his hopes.

"Son," he had said, "I'm as rich as they go any time I let go of a chunk of sentiment about N'gibbidi."

I had thought he was merely putting forth a careless alibi for failure, but now his preposterous pronouncement to Sir Samuel got me guessing so hard that I sought his company, in hope of confidences. I had no competitors. Not that he was churlish but he had no small talk. The great silences seemed to have claimed him. His gray, off-seeing eyes reminded you of the lines—

> He set his face in many a solitary space betwixt the sea and the open sky.

But our respectable company saw only a boorish fellow—a commonplace man of average build, and sadly in need of clothes. Strangely, when he had come that time to N'gua he had seemed large and formidable. But that may have been the effect on me of the wild tales of his adventures told in the chop-rooms. Or it may have been his bushy beard and a certain air of command that was his when on the trail, in his own element as it were.

We became quite chummy. At N'gua I had grubstaked him to five pounds worth of barter. The deed now returned bread upon the waters. And, too, I think he wanted a pair of ears for his groping perplexities. I got a suspicion that he was sounding the sentiments of another on the right of the natives to their traditions and to live their lives their own way.

He had been very, very close to the hearts of the blacks, and seemed to be unconsciously championing their cause. He asserted that savages were not ferocious beings given over to senseless killing, and that if a white man gets killed it is ten to one his own fault.

"O, white man, if you stay too long you will never go away," is the warning of the blacks. If the white stays too long Africa will claim his bones or chain his soul. Was that last the case with Roach? But what I wanted to hear was what he had run into in N'gibbidi.

The single social division of the sternwheeler was broken up by the Liverpool boat at the delta port. Mons was lost to us in a suite de luxe. Roach had scared up enough coin for first cabin. The purser asked if I minded sharing cabin with "that fellow Roach." Far from it. It was a great bit of luck, for off Liberia I nursed Roach through a bad attack of blackwater, after which there could be no reserves.

Anyway, he really wanted to talk over the N'gibbidi venture; wanted another's opinion or interpretation. He seemed a bit mystified as to what had actually happened, often giving a detail in the shape of a question—did I, for instance, think that Kolo, *Sariki* of N'gibbidi, had with knowing cunning slipped one over on him?

He never got down to telling the tale of his adventure, for that would have seemed like egotism. Instead, he gave incidents here and there, without sequence—an incident related as we plowed through the green seas of the Bay of Biscay furnishing the prolog to some other yarn told away back, off the blinding surf line of the Fever Coast. But the real tale opened with Roach's long palaver with Bilibibilo, which means "Born-the-day-the-hippo-was-killed," or "Born-when-the-frogs-sang," or something like that.

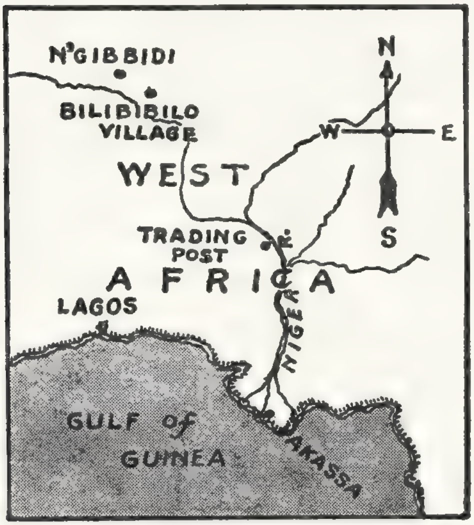
FOR some obscure reason or policy Bilibibilo suavely evaded Roach's drives at a concession to work the rich tin deposits of the low plateau that stretched south of his village. The tin lay there in gullets of alluvial mud, right on the surface.

"The biggest thing I ever struck," said Roach, when telling how he had traced the source of the tin anklets and armlets of Negroland to Bilibibs' country. "Labor a-plenty for a sixpence in barter a man a day. No expensive machinery. Oodles of it right on the surface. The Cornwall tin mines are a mile down in the earth. Tin's selling around a hundred and fifty dollars a ton. Tiny and me had struck it rich. No capital or machinery required. A one-man boss job."

But Bilibibs was deaf when tin was mentioned. Day after day at cool of sundown the palaver was resumed, Roach sitting crosslegged under the overhanging thatch of Bilibibs' roof with Tiny squatting like a huge black toad at his back. Opposite them Bilibibilo squatted on his fat hams, his wide back to his mud wall—

a Burmese god in ebony—cunning fat-folded eyes, Billiken grin, navel centering a big stomach that bulged over his G-string, and perched rakishly on his wool a very ungodlike top hat which Roach had "dashed" him.

Stroking a decorative leopard's tooth that pierced his thick upper lip, Bilibibs blandly dodged the issue by introducing utterly frivolous subjects, as: Did the Great Spirit make the sun ere He made the moon and stars; did day precede night? An attendant Methusela wizard held that the moon and stars came first, and then the Great Spirit, perceiving that the light was insufficient for man, went at it again and made the sun.



Thus day after day, or night after night, the tin business was sidetracked for natural theology, until the droning gutturals of the dialect became as permanent as the winking stars and leg-fiddling crickets.

If Roach was impatient at all it was with his patience. Perhaps he was vaguely conscious of sentiments behind his patience that were opposed to ruthless exploitation, for in telling of the palaver he sheepishly admitted a wariness of trespassing on some tradition or sentiment involved in his quest of the tin fields.

He even sought to excuse his patience to himself as the inertia of fever—felt his pulse, and found there was a bit of fever, as was only to be expected, with the crickets heralding the rainy season. But he was playing the ostrich with the true state of affairs. Had a psychologist warned him that too close association with the blacks had resulted in a state of sympathy for them which forbade their exploitation; or had a wizard, by means of the entrails of a spitted hen, claimed that his divination shadowed forth sacrifice of fortune to this sentiment—with what inward guffaws Roach would have heard these prophecies.

A week of palaver netted Roach but one item of information: An unguarded admission from Bilibibs that he had no authority over the tin fields, but was responsible to an overlord. That was quite likely, or as likely it was another dodging invention. Roach set out to trick from Bilibibs the name, title and the town of the overlord, or expose the invention. But Bilibibs clammed up as if he had committed a grave indiscretion.

It remained for the Kroo to suggest a purely mercenary motive behind the stalling.

"Marsa," bayed Tiny, "dey done eat us up."

Eat them up! Familiar African cunning in that. Exhaust the white man's beads, salt, cottons by charges for his lodgment in the Hut of the Strangers and for yams and mealies consumed. Roach thought perhaps Bilibibs' spies had nosed out the umbrella which he kept wrapped in the barter cottons, out of sight of covetous eyes, for umbrellas are the insignia of chieftest chiefs, and as such much desired. Such swank was not for Bilibibs—not if he had an overlord.

Roach dropped into the king's ears an item that was calculated to bring the myth or fact of the overlord to a flat issue.

"O King, I take your overlord an umbrella."

He meant Bilibibs to understand that in holding up one who came with presents for his overlord he was taking a grave risk on the overlord's displeasure. But the king's big face was as a moon in eclipse as far as it registered any emotion. Such indifference to the temper of an overlord inclined Roach to doubt the latter's existence, till suddenly the thought struck him that Bilibibs might be acting under orders from the overlord. That would explain drumming which he had heard every night after the adjournment of the palaver, when a drum in the village would start talking with one out on the plateau.

But why hold the white man in endless palaver when he could be got rid of by refusal of yams and mealies? And why was Bilibibs so secretive about his overlord?

"O king, is thy overlord's name taboo with thee?" asked Roach.

Bilibibs heaved from his diaphragm a laconic proverb—

"The goat was curious to count the teeth of the lion."

Oh, he would have Roach know that this overlord was a terrible, terrible personage—to be feared, avoided. And, as if in saying that little of his suzerain he had said too much, Bilibibs pulled up on his bowed legs blowing hard, had waddled off into his courtyard. Thus again the palaver was put over, without any offense that could be pinned down.

This cautious care occupied Roach's thoughts as with Tiny he swung down the village to the Hut of the Strangers. Was it dictated by policy or fear? How could a whole village, every hut of which had an assegai, be in fear of one unarmed white? He was not worried, but curious, perplexed; and harassed by a feeling that he was an intruder—a disturber. Something was going on behind the curtain of this cunning. It might be trivial or bizarre to the reasoning, practical minds of whites, yet be of passionate and momentous importance to the blacks. He had to think of that. In fact, Roach's deeply rooted sympathy for the blacks was working all the time upon his mind. He was seeing both sides of the shield in this fortune hunting in Negroland.

Hardly had he and his Kroo taken to the reed mats in their lodging when, as on previous nights, a tom-tom in the village began talking with a drum on the plateau. Roach listened with ear to the ground. The drum language is a carefully guarded secret; all he could do was to gage the distance. Allowing night time and the best conditions for the travel of sound, the other drum could not be more than four miles away. Then if the progress of the palaver was being reported to the overlord, there was either a town within easy march or else the message was relayed. Roach located the direction of the sound as due south. A warning fever ache in his bones and the threat of the rains decided him. Come daybreak he would scout the south trail. Anyway, the move would force Bilibibs to show his colors.

So at gray dawn Roach and Tiny left their hut, only to meet a stranger in the village and to have Bilibibilo suddenly eliminated as a factor in the quest for tin.

The stranger was a tall, erect figure in turban and burnoose, the latter hanging loosely around his bony, spare frame. He carried a *gilau,* a gourd with two gut strings and with dried seeds inside. A member of the nomadic troubadours of Negroland? But in that case the women, early about their domestic work, would be all around him, clamoring for a dance or a tribal lay. They affected, however, not to see the man. Were they so instructed? He advanced in the path of Roach, so plainly intent on bringing about a meeting that Roach jumped to the exciting conclusion that he had come there for that purpose.

Oh, no doubt last night's drumming had told of Bilibibs' indiscreet disclosure of an overlord, and now was come a more able representative to take charge of the situation, or perhaps a spy. The man had not the shuffling gait of a mendicant troubadour, but walked as one to whom dignity was a natural mantle. His swarthy features were sternly acquiline, with none of the negroid characteristics of the villagers.

A string of prayer beads wound round a bony wrist proclaimed a Mohammedan. Snow-white though his brows and lashes were, the flashings of a prime intellect could be seen in the black eyes, straight-seeing and piercing, as if they were exploring Roach, boring into his motives, sizing him up. A wise old bird, bony, hard as flint, "right there."

"*Sanu sanu!*" he hailed in the Shua tongue, and shook his right fist in Roach's face, after the manner of the salute of the Shua, whose right fists ever grasped prayer beads, while the left held reins—but the Shua country was many leagues away. Then he spoke in Housa—the trade and diplomatic language of the tribes.

Apropo of nothing he waved an arm to the south and said it was "bad medicine country," was "Ju Ju country," by which Roach perceived a convert whose Mohammedanism had not quite drowned out the old superstitions. Or was it inability to express "evil" in Housa?

Plainly, too, he had traveled far, which is so rare in an African, who is homesick the moment he is out of sight of his village, that Roach was excitedly guessing all around the mulberry bush. The man again waved an arm toward the south, repeating that it was bad country—for white man. Sometimes African cunning is guileless.

Roach thought he might be a nomad troubadour after all, for the rogues are often propagandists, hired by sultans and emirs to sing their glories in the marketplaces and to inspire dread of their names. This fellow might be the agent of the overlord, sent to intimidate Roach. But why so much trouble to frighten him off, when all he wanted was to take the tin, to the betterment of the natives, in the way of Manchester prints, beads, salt, tobacco and such? Why frighten him away when he could with less trouble have been hustled away? Still trying to get rid of him without quarrel or open aggression!

Oh, a propagandist was the minstrel. Terrible tales he chanted of the plateau; tales of bush-devils lurking by the trail, of plaguing evil spirits; a detailed tale of fearsome men-monsters with heads all bone—huge, fleshless heads with long protruding jaws and gleaming fangs. These monsters guarded N'gibbidi, a town in the bad country. Kolo, *Sariki* of N'gibbidi, had sworn by Allah and the koran to take the head from the shoulders of any white man who spied on N'gibbidi. Oh, terrible tales, given without a flicker of the steady eyes, with a carrying modulated basso. And the teller might have believed his tales or not, it was all one if he made the white man believe, or, again, that might be of small moment, if the tale served for a prolonged sizing up of the white.

Roach experienced a sudden jocund sense of at-homeness. These tales of bush-devils and monsters were familiar "nigger stuff," a species of African frightfulness, intimidation with a purpose. He noted an ineptness in the man's fingering of the strings of his *gilau*, while his rolling of the dried seeds in interpretation of the fearful sounds emitted by the Fleshless Heads would have made a real minstrel blush for his art.

A masquerader! Was it—could it be Kolo himself? Hardly had Roach made the exciting mental query, when the fellow throated an anathema of Kolo the Terrible.

"I am the Burr that sticks to the passer-by!" he declaimed, smacking the back of the *gilau* with flat palm, with a sound like a blunt knife struck into a green apple, or exactly the sound of an executioner's sword on the bent neck of a kneeling man, which was what Roach took it to mean.

"I am the Burr that sticks to the passer-by!"

Aye—"I"—Kolo himself. Kolo to the life. Kolo the bluffer has said his little say and now takes himself off; and Bilibibs' simple children forget their rôle and succumb to habit, jumping like frightened cats before their departing overlord.

The deadlock with Bilibibs was broken. At last Roach had something tangible to attack. Still, he thought it best not to strain the passive resistance by following up the masquerader there and then, but waited until dark, when he set forth with Tiny to explore the south trail. A sentinel shape stole after them, gave a low call and was joined by many others.

They made a ring about Roach. They argued with him, pleaded and implored him to turn back. He pushed them aside good-naturedly. They whispered in his ears of frightful things that would happen to him if he persisted in going the way he was taking. He was their guest; they were his friends; they wished him well. If he went the way he was going he would never, never return.

Kolo, they said, had a dreadful magic. He could turn men into toads. They got in his way—massed solidly before him. He walked around them. They cried over him with a great play of distress. Roach laughed.

Perhaps there was fever in his blithe optimism, for his legs were groggy, his head hollow. His tormentors wanted him to sit down and make palaver about it. He would never come back, they said. Then the whites would come with guns and demand his murderers and burn the village.

They came to a forking of the trail. The blacks pointed out to him the trail that slanted west as the one he should take. Promptly he took the other. They closed in around him shoulder to shoulder, making a compact ring. He pushed through. Yet the only aggressive attempt to detain him by force came from his Kroo.

Terrified by the cries and tales of the blacks Tiny suddenly dropped on the trail and locked arms about Roach's knees, blubbering:

"Marsa, dis country no am fit. Marsa, I no fit to go on."

No fit? Not proper country. Tiny was not able or willing to go on. Roach took the Kroo's pack, told him not to be afraid, but go back to the village and wait his return. If he was not back in ten sleeps Tiny would know he had "gone *abambo*," gone to spiritland, died.

He left the Kroo kneeling on the trail, staring after him wistfully. Such determination broke the hearts of the plaguing blacks. They saw it was no good. They sat down on the trail, calling their warnings after him, till he had walked beyond earshot.

Not idly had he bidden Tiny wait ten sleeps. He calculated that Kolo had not come far, for it had been midnight when the village tom-tom reported the palaver and Bilibib's careless admission of an overlord. Say, then, Kolo had walked six hours. He, Roach, ought to make N'gibbidi by midnight—but he did not. Fever was an old story with him, and by that reason he should have heeded the warning burn in his bones while he was still in the village.

He could not have reached N'gibbidi that night, for he afterward recollected lying out under a broiling sun and crawling with tongue out toward a body of water that existed only in the hallucinations of thirst or else in mirage. He had a vague memory of going on and on under a skyful of stars—of stumbling along, a figure in a dream, an embodied soul dragging through a vast solitude of fantastic cacti and conical ant-hills.

He must have made it the second night, or he would have perished of thirst. He gravitated like an automaton, the pack growing heavier and heavier, but never a thought entered his head to discard it, never a thought of giving up. An automaton with one controlling idea—if an automaton can be said to have an idea.

At last he sighted, or thought he sighted, a wide spreading town on a rise. A real town of house-lined streets; houses of clay with flat roofs. Anyway, he found himself trying to enter a town. He could not see it, yet was so close to it that he heard the bleatings of tethered goats.

For some strange reason he could not get into the town. Though he kept going, the bleatings of the goats still remained close, yet far. The trail went in and out between abominable walls that tore his clothes and scratched his hands. Walls so close that he was ever brushing against them. It seemed to him that he traversed miles and miles between the walls, the bleating goats always just on the other side.

Often he sat down to rest, to try to think, but as often fever overcame him and he lost track of everything. He heard cocks crowing the coming dawn. Presently a gray light revealed the walls to be growing thorny cacti. He struggled to his weak legs, slouched on, till of a sudden he found that he was following his own boot tracks. He was walking in a cacti maze. N'gibbidi was stockaded by a maze of cacti. He sank down to the earth again.

He heard, or thought he heard, voices close by. He imagined eyes leering through the cacti; leering, jeering, evil faces mocking his plight. Well, he would show them. Men or devils, he would show them! He would take a cotton print from his pack, tear it to pieces and mark his trail. He drew himself up on his knees and reached for his pack. The movement sent the blood into his dizzy head. He fell prone and lost consciousness.

Men-shapes with monstrous heads of bone two feet or more long, with protruding jaws and gleaming teeth, were bending over him. —— this fever! Nightmarish hands were tugging at his clothes. No; they were lifting him. Beings with arms and legs were lifting him shoulder high and bearing him along. Arms and legs like human beings, but with ossified heads like crocodiles, all bony and shiny in the morning light. Crocodile skulls! Ought to have thought of that—frightfulness—nigger stuff. He lapsed again into delirium.

A burning throat, a hot, clammy abomination plastered to his skin, a bed of the same stuff, patches of sweating clay walls showing through vapors that smelled of stablings, heads, brown arms, twin breasts appearing and dissolving in the steaming vapors were the notations of Roach's returning senses.

He tried to rise, but a witch-doctor painted in red ocher and *alumbi* chalk appeared suddenly at his side and pushed him down, then took him by his nose, pinching the nasal passages. Roach gasped for air, and received a wooden spoonful of lime and red pepper. He struggled to bring his will power to marshal his senses to learn what was being done to him. He made out a charcoal brazier and a pot of boiling water, just as a female took the pot and with a ladle sprinkled hot water on the poulticing abomination all over him.

He got it that he was a patient in a sweathouse, bedded down in goat stablings. His reaction to the discovery was a lazy interest in the treatment. He had no energy to think ahead, to speculate on what might come after the cure—he slept.

THE witch-doctor was bending over him again. But he was not to be tortured this time with lime and red pepper. After a long look into his eyes the wizard gave a sign to the women in the background. A terrific din of tomtoms, hand clapping, shrieking, and blowing through hollow sticks with pebbles in them ensued. The wizard pulled a plug from an inch hole in the wall over Roach's head. Roach managed to remember that all this meant that the evil spirit of his sickness had been exorcised and was being scared out through the little hole, which presently the wizard plugged against its return.

A woman went down on her knees at the foot of a wall and began clawing wet clay from a stopped up entrance. The vapors began to clear. Roach was lifted from the bed to the floor, his body washed, then dressed in his khaki rags. Then he was pushed and pulled through the hole at the foot of the wall into a white dawn and carried across an open space that was the hub of radiating, narrow streets. The wizard walked behind, making marks in the ground which the evil spirit dared not pass.

Oh, they were doing the best for him, according to their way of it. But why such friendliness? He was set down in an open fronted house facing the open center, so that he had all the comings and goings of N'gibbidi in view. A procedure so contrary to African suspicion, which sees a spy in every stranger and ensures his lodgment in the Hut of the Stranger at the end of the village, where he can spy upon nothing, got Roach guessing as to what manner of man was Kolo—what his policy might be.

He had been restored to health, his pack was there in the room—his property inviolate—and there, too, was a gourd of goat's milk, a calabash of *nakia* cakes and wild honey. All this was so contrary to that resounding smack on the *gilau* and the growl, "I am the Burr that sticks to the passerby" that Roach was all at sixes and sevens. Anyway he was too weak to care or to think deeply.

Now, it might almost be that the witch-doctor had cast a spell or worked an enchantment on Roach. Not that this was his his explanation when telling aboard the Liverpool boat of those N'gibbidi days. He confined himself to picturing scenes, and seemed to make the pictures screens to his emotions, or as if he said—

"There; it was like that. Make what you can of it."

His enchantment was probably no more than the spiritual flights of convalescence. He spoke of the beauty of clouds as if it were a discovery. Nothing in the world is so beautiful as clouds after months of monotonous steel-blue, empty skies, nothing more refreshing that the feel of rain in the air after the oven heat of the long dry spell, nor anything more full of poetry than palms, that have been as painted scenery for many months when they sail their fronds in vagrant winds.

Roach was as those who have come back to the world from sickness that has taken them close to the Borderland and find the world intenser and more full of meaning. But it would have annoyed him to be told that when the physical senses are at low ebb the psychic is stronger.

It would have been like imputing the exalting gladness, the sense of oneness with the universe of those convalescing hours to weakness, to something exotic, when he wanted robustly to believe that his N'gibbidi experience had been the sanest passage in his life.

He was in N'gibbidi in quest of the one-man boss job, the biggest thing he had ever struck—oodles of tin right on the surface; and yet he sat there dreaming on the great cloud masses with sunflamed edges, and dreamily watching the cloud shadows sailing slowly over the roofs and sands, while before him flowed the simple life of N'gibbidi, domestic and placid.

And where were the monster-men? Were the crocodile skulls put on only when a stranger was seen nearing the town? A free, buoyant people! Bronzed Eves with clay pitchers balanced on erect heads, babies carried on hips. Men in togas, walking leisurely, as if a day were a year. A bow to every back. Had Kolo been really a troubadour, how he might have rolled the seeds in the *gilau* in orchestral interpretation of the short, rippling vowels of the dialect, the trill of women's laughter, prattle of children and the rhythmic pounding of pestles in millet bowls.

The picture was not new to Roach. He had seen its like a thousand times. But now his response to it was different. Something haunting and wistful in it. For instance the trestle of food under a large baobab tree that stood in the open center—that meant a votive offering to the ancestral spirits that dwelt in the tree. Well, Roach had seen such sights times without number. But now— What atavistic emotions it stirred up, traditions, primitive religions. Ancestral worship—why not? Oh, yes, white man, if you stay in Africa too long you will slip your moorings.

But all this was lazy and hazy. In fact Roach's head did not get on the job till he saw a man spread a dyed sheepskin under the baobab. Dyed sheepskins being the emblematic thrones of the princes of Negroland, Roach was not surprized to see the tall, lean figure of the false troubadour walk majestically to the skin and occupy it and open court with a recitation from the Koran.

The Koran preached under a tree of ancestral spirits? Naturally, Roach did a lot of guessing around this man who mixed up Mahomet and negro superstitions, saluted in Shua and spoke in Hausa, and used yet another tongue in his court. Was it that frightfulness having failed to keep the white man away from N'gibbidi, a policy of friendliness was being tried out? If Roach had given it a thought, no such thought was apparent in the word-pictures he made of that day—objective pictures, as if he were deliberately playing the ostrich with the true state of affairs within himself. The scene under the baobab seems to have made him a fierce exponent of patriarchal justice as against the written laws of civilization.

Roach was not surprized that at breaking up of the court Kolo strode over to him, and with a gesture that considerately excused the sick guest from rising, again gave the Shua salute. Aye, they met again, and some things were now understood between them as, for instance, propagandic frightfulness. The visit was brief. Kolo had only to say that he hoped the white man would get well quickly, for his people were very poor, the granaries empty; the guest was eating them up.

The rogue would have Roach understand that there was nothing in N'gibbidi for the white man to covet, nothing worthy of the white's barter. With Kolo already advised by Bilibilio's drummers of his, Roach's, quest of the tin his little play did not get by. It only showed that the opposition to his quest was still cunningly active, and if Roach was still patient he had an alibi for the fugitive sentiments behind his patience.

"After all I had blundered in where I wasn't asked," was his way of putting it.

Anyway there was no course of action open, nor any call for hurry. He basked on in the symphony of N'gibbidi, delighting in a torrential downpour in late afternoon, and later enjoyed an after-dinner cabaret, furnished by women dancing under the tree of the ancestral spirits. A dance to the ancestral spirits. Dance and religion—why not?

"I don't know but what they've got the rights of it," reflected Roach in telling it. "But the missionaries would put an end to all that in no time," he added, with ever the note of wistful question.

A raucous, an almost bitter note in the last sentence exposed a passionate sentiment behind the homely speech on the rights of the N'gibbidi people to their ancient dances and traditions. But for those weeks of intimacy at sea little would I have suspected Roach of harboring the stuff of which great poets are made. But, there, his large simplicity would be very susceptible and responsive to the direct appeal to the emotions of the shapely figures whirling in and out the shadows and moonlight pools under the baobab, the hand-clapping and low tomtoming and tonal chant, the patter of naked feet on the sand mingling with the click click of tin anklets and wristlets. *Te deum* and *num dimitus* expressed in dance.

Kolo made another visit next day, sitting down this time, to tell the fortune seeker of journeyings he had made in Nigeria; of strange things he had seen, such as airplanes, which were "sailing tents blown on the wind," and when he spoke of the whites blowing words on the wind from one place to another Roach recognized wireless telegraphy.

Kolo had not been awed by white man's inventions; had no wonder or respect of them as scientific marvels, but took them as evidence of the white man's mysterious powers—"*Allah il Allah,*" and that was all there was to it. The Zunguru Railroad was a land canoe propelled by fire spirits which the white man kept in a box and beat them so that they gave forth cries and groans and sometimes emitted a piercing scream, as when the engineer blew the whistle.

He seemed to have a dread of the whites as a dominant, harsh, driving people who knew no mercy; a people that made war and bartered, and were ever restlessly going and coming. They had canoes which were like great houses, and which he called "Oo-oo-oos." He must have been down to the coast and heard a ship's siren.

Not that Kolo was vainglorious or talking for talk's sake. Consciously or unconsciously, the *sariki* was hitting right at the tenderest spot in Roach's mind. He, Roach, had an uncomfortable feeling, a guilty feeling that he and his kind, the white race, was playing it low down. Kolo spoke of the *goberment*—the only English word in his speech, perhaps because he had not the Hausa equivalent for government.

He spoke the word with awe, as of some malignant, all-powerful force, and as if it were responsible for conditions he had found on the Gold Coast, where women no longer nursed their babes, but fed them the milk of cows from "gourds which the eyes see through" feeding bottles, and the young had no respect for their elders.

Propaganda or not, it played the very deuce with Roach's hope of exploiting the tin fields. It challenged his right to blight N'gibbidi as the Gold Coast had been blighted. There, before his eyes swung a babbling group of full-breasted women, rhymthic, buoyant and free—and in the twinkling of an eye they became scurrying females in dragging gingham, their hand-molded clay pitchers displaced by kerosene cans. Men in Roman togas became impudent blacks in derbies, striped trousers and patent leather shoes; *gilaus* and legends were displaced by jazz on cheap gramophones; while the sun, moon, stars were forgotten in a strife of acquisition.

Roach was led off the track by the thought that if Kolo was dead-set against granting the tin concession there were daggers a-plenty in N'gibbidi that could dispose of him as he slept. But he lay down every night with perfect assurance. A big light fell on this angle of the situation when one day "The Burr" told how the *goberment* came to N'duna. The men of N'duna put a white man to the assegais. Other whites came with soldiers and guns and avenged the killing. They installed another ruler over N'duna, one who did their bidding. They stayed in N'duna; and then the white prophets, missionaries, came to N'duna, and thus the *goberment* and the hut tax and the religion of the whites were established.

So it was thanks to the N'duna killing that Roach owed the cunning care not to give him offense, or to get rid of him by assegai or poison. He was an intruder who put Kolo in a pathetically helpless position. An intruder bully backed by the guns of the whites. Why, the R. S. C., which he loathed with a fierce individualism that made him turn down repeated offers to join the Company's payroll, would have profited by his killing and made an excuse for a punitive expedition and a grab. The joke was on him all round. But it was not a joke that he could get a laugh over.

Cunning indeed was the policy of the African "Peter the Great," who had gone forth to see what the countries around him were doing and how they were faring, and had returned with a passionate desire to save his people's war exercises, their legends and traditions. He had, it turned out, adopted Mohammedanism as a protective measure, having observed that the whites were less aggressive against it than against the weaker paganism. Mohammedanism stood boldly against Christianity, and by adopting it he put N'gibbidi under the protection of the calif.

But—an appeal to remote Constantinople, and a cacti stockade and crocodile skulls to stop the frontier expansion of the mighty British Empire when the "sir knight" financiers reached out for the N'gibbidi tin! Surely such an idea ought to have been funny, and Roach's inability to get a hearty laugh out of it should have warned him that his sympathies were gathering like rain clouds to drown out his hopes.

One thing that helped fool him as to the hold Kolo's cause was getting on him, was that he was not altogether sure in his own mind that the black statesman had the right of it. Livingstone and Stanley and civilization had their side, too. One need not go back many years to call up the horrific burial of a King of Ashantee; a grave-pit of half an acre, and all the king's wives and a thousand or more slaves and the king's dogs' limbs broken with clubs and all thrown into the grave-pit, to accompany the king to *Abamabo*.

But the pros and cons of the question were not for Roach. It was decided in his emotions. One day Kolo brings a Koran, and how can Roach, after such hospitality and so many amiable discourses, refuse the friendship oath? So, black hands resting on white on the Koran, eye looking into eye, Roach accepted the sacred tie.

"Now we sleep behind the Koran," bayed Kolo with deep satisfaction—or was it relief. "Now we sleep behind the Koran." Exactly as if he said in triumphant faith, "Now I have you bound by friendship, conscience and honor."

Not for nothing had Kolo put the white man to a searching sizing up at their first meeting in Bilibibs' village. Had the wise old Moses wanted a first-hand estimate of the man whose patience his fealty chief had been unable to wear down? Not for nothing had Kolo traveled far, sizing up traders and officials. Had he penetrated Roach's simple large-heartedness and worked out a bit of applied psychology? Not unlikely. "Now we sleep behind the Koran." Fatal words to Roach's quest.

Here the fortune seeker's drama might have risen to a soul-tearing conflict. But Roach never consciously surrendered his tin hope. He was gently flimflammed by the greatest of hard-luck-story artists, and didn't know he was stalemated in this hard game of fortune hunting till he found himself actually plotting with Kolo to secure N'gibbidi against the greed of capitalism.

Great indeed must have been Kolo's faith in the bonds of the Koran oath and in Roach's honor, but they found no other way to block the exploiters than that Roach should acquire sole mining and trading rights to the country under the *sariki's* rule. So Kolo called his *Galadima*, prime minister or secretary of state, an ancient with horn spectacles, who, with indigo pen, inscribed on goatskin parchment the concession, all three then signing.

The umbrella passed to the possession of Kolo as the "consideration" in the contract, all legal and fine. Of course it was understood that this was only a friendly conspiracy; the concession would lie inoperative, at least as long as Kolo lived. That done, Roach was escorted beyond the cacti maze. For farewell The Burr took the white hands of the passerby and breathed on them the blown blessing, saying, as between the Koran-sworn——

"Brother, you will tell the whites we are a poor people."

So Roach was the lad who must turn propagandist and give it out that there were no worth-while pickings in N'gibbidi.

If the idea of crocodile skulls and a maze of thorny cacti arresting the driving forces of civilization—finance, church, trade—were laughable, what of a scallywag, whose sole expenditures on three weeks voyaging was cut plug and a cheap cotton-wool suit, cap and pair of shoes bought at Las Palmas, a scallywag with a bit of inscribed parchment blocking Sir Samuel Mons?

It was cruel, but almost a duty, to indicate to Roach how slight were his foundations: He had secured old Kolo's dream in a way that revealed much anxious thinking, which in turn showed how deeply he had taken to heart his obligations to his Koran oath.

He had, on a former home trip, scouted up in London an American lawyer and used his services to incorporate the concession in America. Nations are very sensitive about attacks on their foreign investments. In a word, Roach had enlisted the guns of the United States in Kolo's behalf, and stood ready to enlist the sentiment anent the self-determination of small peoples.

But one of these days old Kolo will be paying his debt to Allah—dying. Then Roach will eliminate the danger to N'gibbidi legend and traditions by removing the tin, with labor imported from the Pagan Belt; the men-monsters and the cacti maze guarding the Dance to the Ancestral Spirits beneath the baobab will disappear forever.

Was he conscious of great renunciation? He said he was returning to the coast by the same boat; couldn't afford a holiday ashore. And only a sentiment stayed him from grabbing off an immediate fortune. But he was utterly unconscious of self-sacrifice.

"I savvy the blacks and they savvy me. They've got their rights as much as we. I'm no blooming Cecil Rhodes."

No, Roach would never be a Cecil Rhodes, nor a knighted Mons.

The Bush Lopers

A Five-Part Story by Hugh Pendexter

Part III

Author of "The Homesteaders," "Iroquois! Iroquois!" etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

"CARCAJOU"—the Wolverene—was fleeing from Quebec, where he had gone to confess his sins. He was a "bush loper," an illicit trader with the Indians and English; and in this year of 1687 the Government of New France was attempting to maintain a monopoly by inflicting stern punishment on all those who infringed it. Therefore he knew that Governor Denonville was likely to continue the pursuit of him even to Mackinac, to La Baye des Puantes (Green Bay) or to the Narrows (Detroit).

In his flight he learned that one Captain Rooseboom, a representative of "Corlaer," as the Indians called any governor of New York, was heading an expedition to take the Indians' trade away from the French. So also was another New York trader named McGregorie. Immediately Carcajou's nimble mind began devising a scheme whereby he might act as messenger and thereby gain favor with Durantaye, or Du Lhut, or Perrot, French commandants of the Upper Lakes posts, thereby possibly escaping punishment for his free trading.

At Cayuga Creek on the Little Niagara he captured a runaway Dutchman from New York Province named Dirk Brouwer, for whom Governor Dongan had issued a warrant on the charge of smuggling.

"You live, m'sieur," said the bush loper, "on two conditions: That you employ me as your *engagé*, and that you travel to Mackinac and La Baye."

At a portage they met the murderer Turcot, the fugitive dandy Chartier, fresh from France; Black Kettle, a Seneca friend of Carcajou; and Dead Bear, a Seneca whom Chartier had rescued from service as a galley slave, and who could not rejoin his Iroquois tribe because he had suffered the disgrace of being whipped.

The strange party paddled its way along the north shore of Lake Erie. At last they made the Narrows, ahead of all pursuit. There they were joined by Papa La Blanche, an old man who had so many wives among the various tribes that he could not remember them all. He was accompanied by Adario—the Rat—chief of the Tionantati. The party held a carouse, then went into a drunken slumber. In the middle of the night Carcajou felt a hand at his throat. He seized his assailant, and by the light of the fire which others renewed he stared in amazement at the stupid face and rolling eyes of Papa La Blanche. Limply clutched in the old man's hand was a long knife—his own.

BUT Carcajou did not suspect Papa of trying to kill him, for Papa had been helpless as a log from drink, whereas his assailant had been able to break away from his grip. That morning one of the Rat's men was found murdered with a new French ax. Carcajou denied that any of his party did it, but drew up an order on DuLhut at the Narrows to send presents in requital. Then the party left the Tionontati to resume their journey. On the way, much to Chartier's puzzlement, friction developed between Carcajou and Brouwer.

"Brouwer wants to say something, but is too wise. The Wolverene feels that Brouwer is thinking bad thoughts about him, and his heart is hot," observed Dead Bear.

At last they reached Point St. Ignace, where the French had a palisaded fort commanded by Captain Morel de la Durantaye. Walking toward the fort, Carcajou met three former acquaintances in the form of the giant half-breed Dubeau, "the Picard" and John Black—a name asumed—a renegade from the English colonies, wanted for murder. While he and Dubeau were engaged in a friendly, but terrible fight Brouwer went on and told the commandant about Rooseboom's and McGregorie's trading expeditions on the way from New York.

When Carcajou entered Durantaye's presence he found the commandant conferring with Chevalier de Tonty on the best way to arouse the Ottawas to go against the Iroquois according to Governor Denonville's orders, thereby stirring up trouble for the English. Hoping for immunity to punishment as a bush loper, Carcajou told the two captains that their Ottawas, together with the Hurons, were planning to ask for peace and friendship with the Iroquois and English, and that if Rooseboom and McGregorie ever reached Fort Mackinac with the

"The Bush Lopers," copyright, 1925, by Hugh Pendexter.

English presents the Indians were sure to rise and massacre all the French on the Upper Lakes and the Illinois.

"They must be captured before they get here," he added, "and be made to look like very small men in the Indians' eyes."

Just then a messenger from the Narrows entered bearing the note which Carcajou had sent to Du Lhut asking him to send presents to the Rat, who, the note added, was about ready to jump to the English. The commandant flew into a rage and ordered Carcajou in irons. However, he escaped, and with old Papa La Blanche set about paddling like mad westward to find his friend Nicolas Perrot, former governor of the Upper Lake country, who he knew would understand everything and afford him protection.

At the Oconto River they encountered a party of twelve Fox tribe hunters. The whites were forced to kill one of them to make their escape, and two others, messengers sent from the home village, to prevent the hunting party from knowing that the Foxes had taken the warpath against the French.

Then he hurried on after Perrot, whom he found making camp on the Fox River. Perrot placated the Foxes and promised Carcajou a pardon from New France when they returned to Niagara. The Foxes, won over to the French side, promised to return with the party to Mackinac and Niagara as allies against the English.

After the departure of the Foxes a Potowatomi runner came up with a "medicine-talk"—letter—for Perrot. Carcajou saw Perrot's face grow stern and gloomy as he read. Carcajou hid himself.

"This is serious," muttered Perrot. "That fellow Carcajou will get himself killed yet."

The bush loper whispered to La Blanche:

"Find out what is in that paper. I can hear ghosts laughing at me. Be quick!"

PAPA LA BLANCHE slipped through the growth until he could enter the path above the camp. In a few minutes he was strolling into the firelight. The moment Perrot saw him he called out—

"Where is Carcajou?"

"I left him in the woods. He is like an owl. He likes darkness. When night comes it is the time for warm blankets."

Perrot led him away from the fire so the Frenchmen might not overhear their talk. They talked for some minutes. Then La Blanche returned to the fire and called out—

"I will go find him, m'sieur, if he doesn't return soon."

Perrot resumed his seat on the river bank and stared at the stars in the water. La Blanche gathered up the two packs and blankets and entered the timber. One of the Frenchman went to inform his master. La Blanche hurried deeper into the forest with Carcajou at his heels.

"What is it? What is in the talk?" insisted Carcajou.

"What a fellow you are for trouble! You big ox! Stir your legs and come along. How many men would let you run away after getting that talk from Mackinac. Perrot can catch you if he wants to. The Potawatomi man can track us."

"*Diable m'emporte!* Squaws will be beating me with sticks next!" muttered Carcajou as he slung on his pack and took the lead, moving in a half circle until he could gain the path north of the camp. "Look here, Old Foolish; what's all this about?"

"Not till we're in the canoe. Only a good man like Perrot would give you this chance. My medicine was strong. It saw the Potawatomi man coming. It tried to tell me the talk he had in his girdle, but my old head was stupid. I must make it a big feast."

"Open your talk, or I'll twist your neck, snarled Carcajou.

"Durantaye sends a writing, saying you must be brought a prisoner to Mackinac," hoarsely whispered La Blanche.

"He has the mind of a pig! And all because I borrowed a little of his brandy to make allies for New France," wrathfully jeered Carcajou. "Such a man with such a small head will never help France or serve his Majesty."

"I tell you it is not the brandy. You did right in that, although you gave it to the Menominee men instead to Papa, the owner," said La Blanche as they trotted rapidly toward the mouth of the river. "You had a right to take——"

"Here! Where is your neck? I will twist it in two," savagely cried Carcajou.

"But I am trying to tell you, big bear. The night we ran away from the Mackinac fort two Ottawa men were killed by axes in the Ottawa village. M'sieur Durantaye has listened to evil birds. He knows about the Tionontati man killed at the Narrows. He believes you killed the Ottawas."

"Head of wood!"

"And he tells Perrot to make you a prisoner if he meets you, and to bring you to Mackinac. Perrot lets you escape."

They drew the hidden birch from cover and quickly launched it, with the medicine-bag in the prow. After they had paddled into the bay Carcajou said:

"I have you a witness. You will say I killed no Indians. That is fool's talk. You were with me. You will say I did not leave the camp. That will pay for trying to kill me."

"To kill you? Who?"

"I never meant to tell, Old Papa. At the Narrows, in the night, when you were drunk. I took your knife away and put you back in your blankets."

"Impossible! Drunk or sober, asleep or awake, I never harm my friends!" passionately cried La Blanche. "I would as quick kill my own child."

"Well, we won' talk about that. Our camp at the Narrows must have been a medicine place and we had no business there. This new business is bad. I mean the killing; not the thought of that pig that I did it. The Tionontati man was killed on the Narrows. Now two are killed at Mackinac." Then hopefully, "If they were killed after drinking brandy——."

"That is not it, my little one," interrupted Carcajou. "They were found dead in a lodge with their heads split open. A new French ax was found between them. The Ottawas have refused to go with Durantaye to Niagara. They are afraid. The Hurons says it means the French will betray the tribes to the Iroquois. Durantaye writes that you are friendly to Corlaer, and that he believes you did it to stop the tribes from carrying a club into the Long House. You ran away that night. Durantaye knows no reason why you should run away. He does not know you listened at his window and heard him order you into irons. So you see the business is bad. So we will cross to Sturgeon Bay and portage across to the lake and paddle down to Shekagua.* There is a big Miami village there. I have friends in the tribe. Father Marquette will help us if we go there as he went there once."

"As simple as you are ancient! We go to Mackinac. Do you think Old Empty Head, that Carcajou will leave dead men behind him a second time without knowing who swung the ax? Perrot said I was not a wolverene at the Narrows. I should have learned who killed the Tionontati man. He shall not again say I am foolish and have no cunning.

"Can't you understand that very strong medicine is at work to keep the Upper Lakes tribes from going against the Iroquois? You have said that, but it doesn't seem to mean anything to you. There was the Huron belt and calumet for the Iroquois. Durantaye knew nothing about it till I told him. He's a fool to think I would tell him that if I was friendly to that bad Catholic Dongan.

"May the holy saints help us! Dead men killed with French axes! The Ottawas and Hurons trying to make peace with the Long House. The tribes on this bay trying to rob and kill Perrot and all other Frenchmen. And you, Old Simple, say we shall run away to a Miami village and leave the kettle to boil over. This business must be stopped. We'll get back to Mackinac faster than we left it."

CHAPTER VI

SETTING THE STAGE

POINT ST. IGNACE was unusually quiet as Carcajou drew the canoe ashore and gazed about him. Groups of silent Indians were strung along the shore some distance east of the two Frenchmen and appeared to be interested in the three-hundred feet of vertical rock that was the island of Mackinac.

In the entrance of the fort stockade a soldier stood; he was shading his eyes with his hand and, like the Indians, was peering out on the strait. A short distance from him were two more soldiers, similarly curious. Several soldiers stood some distance back of the Indians. But there was no sign of officers.

"Now what has happened?" demanded Carcajou as he stared at the fort and the people along the shore.

Papa La Blanche devoted his attention to the Ottawa and Huron villages and suggested:

"M'sieur Durantaye has sailed to Detroit. Some Ottawa and Huron men are with him."

Carcajou hastened to the stockade and asked the sentinel—

"Where is m'sieur the commandant?"

"*Bon Dieu!* The wild man!" gasped the sentinel, falling back a step. "If m'sieur the wild man had come a bit earlier he would be tied up."

"They do not tie wolverenes," growled Carcajou. "And you may live to thank the holy saints I came in time to save your hair. What's the matter here? What are you all waiting to see?"

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*Sauk-Fox—"The Place of the Skunk." "Chicago" is derived from it. This was an important locality from very early times.

"M'sieur Durantaye has started for Detroit to whip the Iroquois."

"Without waiting for the brave Perrot!"

"The commandant does not wait for any one," replied the sentinel.

"Upon my faith! He would have been wise at least to have waited for Carcajou," said the bush loper.

The sentinel eyed him uneasily, yet although disturbed by Carcajou's presence he grinned knowingly and replied—

"Wolverene, the commandant might have waited had he known you were coming."

"Fort soldier!" sneered Carcajou. "Watch your tongue or you'll step on it."

"Some must remain to guard the fort. It is for the commandant to say who shall stay and who shall go," sullenly replied the sentinel. "We few men who are left behind are in more danger than those who go with the commandant."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Some Ottawas who started with letters to Quebec, went only a few leagues, then burned the letters and are back. The Hurons favor the English. The Ottawas say they will not take sides with or against the French."

"If they're not with us they're against us!" exclaimed Carcajou. "But see here. You talk nonsense. You've just said they went with the commandant."

"To help him, or try to kill him? Who knows? In the Huron village they say the Hurons with the commandant will turn against him if they meet the English."

"There's no end to this thing," growled Carcajou. "Come along, Old Foolish. We'll find some one who can tell us why they spoil their eyes looking at nothing."

As they hurried toward the long fringe of spectators a black-robed Jesuit cut across their path. Carcajou and La Blanche bared their heads before the blessing of the thin brown hand. Jean Enjalrane, the militant priest, said:

"I have heard about you going to Quebec. God was in your heart to make you go so far and risk so much. You could have come to us here, my son. But I know it was not vanity that sent you to the St. Lawrence."

'It was a wish to be a good Catholic, Father," Carcajou assured him. "I have mended my ways, yet m'sieur the commandant would tie me up. When I heard that I came to find out about it."

"Hold your head low and talk softly when you meet the commandant," advised the priest. "We do not believe you killed the Ottawas. The Ottawas do not believe it. We will try to help you when you meet the commandant."

"But there's small chance of our overtaking him until he makes the Niagara, Father. I shall wait here until Perrot comes."

"He is a good son. He has been generous to the mission at St. François Xavier. We hear only good of him. Father Allouez speaks warmly of him. Yet you may see Monsieur Durantaye sooner than you expect. I am on my way to warn the fort. One of our Ottawa children has just told me his brother has returned with important news. He says his brother turned back when monsieur the commandant met a large force of English down the lake. That must mean they will fight. Some evil influence has been at work on our Hurons. May their eyes be opened to the truth!"

An Ottawa man yelped sharply and pointed across the straight. The priest stared but could see nothing. Carcajou after one glance announced—

"A canoe comes!"

"Then it is all finished, one way or the other," quietly said the priest. "We shall soon know if the English have won. The peace of our Lord. And he walked on toward the fort.

Carcajou hurried forward until he came to some of the soldiers. He abruptly announced:

"There has been a fight down the lake. There comes a man who will tell us who won. If he says the English, then you must fall back to the fort and die as bravely as the good God will permit."

"It is our duty to guard the fort and stores. We should be there now," said one of the men. "You will come with us?"

"A wolverene fights in the woods. If there's trouble, my son, you'll know I'm near. You'll think I have a woodpecker medicine the way I snip them off."

The soldiers began falling back. La Blanche urged:

"You go to the post, my little one. They will not harm me. I have married too many of their women."

"Nor will they hurt me, Old Wife-Snatcher," boldly assured Carcajou.

And, leaving a wake of furious scowls, he unceremoniously plowed his way through the excited savages.

The canoe was advancing rapidly, two men at the paddles and a third in the stern to steer. Some of the watchers plunged waist deep into the icy water and began crying questions. Then a loud shouting ran along the shore as a big flotilla of canoes appeared in the south.

"The Iroquois! The Iroquois!" some one began yelling. And the men in the water frantically scrambled ashore, and women ran to collect and hide their children.

"They are not Iroquois!" bellowed Carcajou. For his eyes, like those of the eagle and red man, were trained for far seeing.

"They come in Iroquois canoes!" howled an Ottawa.

"You talk like an old woman. Your own people made canoes to look like those of the Iroquois," replied Carcajou.

Veteran fighting men began laughing like little children. The Ottawas had copied the Iroquois canoes so their appearance would fill a hostile tribe with fear. But it was great tribute to the Long House that this resemblance could cause a panic and cause a powerful nation foolishly to forget its own subterfuge.

The canoe containing the three savages shot inshore, and the man in the bow leaped into the water, wallowed to land and held up a hand to command silence that he might create a dramatic effect. Then he cried out:

"Onontio's children met many English. They have tied the English and are bringing them here with all their goods and strong waters!"

Pandemonium greeted this intelligence. Women came running back with their children, while the men began hooting and howling and dancing. Some one shouted:

"There will be something to burn. Get dry bark!"

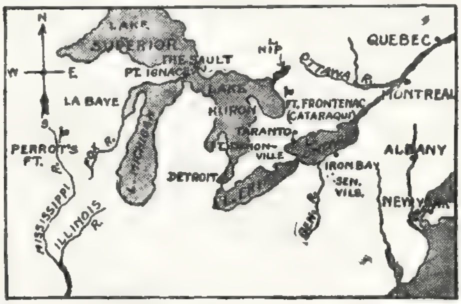
Carcajou ordered La Blanche:

"Take our packs to the woods back of the village. Bring me a blanket. Cover your old head with one. We'll keep covered up for a bit till we see how m'sieur the commandant feels."

He remained with the Indians while La Blanche was on his errand. Some of the Hurons did not join in the merry-making, but they smacked their lips as they thought of the rum. La Blanche returned and gave Carcajou a long blanket. The bush loper threw this over his head and, thus hooded, could not easily be picked out as a white man among other figures similarly covered.

"*Sapristi!* If that keeps up there will be trouble," he muttered as he watched old women scurrying back to the Ottawa village with dry bark. The Huron women refused to make similar preparations.

The canoes were strung out like a long raft, moving four in a line, and as the procession rose and fell on the ruffled waters of the strait it suggested some mythical marine monster. Now the head of the fleet was near enough for individuals to be recognized. Carcajou told La Blanche:



"There is Durantaye, Tonty and Du Lhut in the first canoe."

"They have Ottawa paddlers. It would be better if the Hurons were paddling them," muttered La Blanche.

The Hurons, esteeming themselves to be the bravest and proudest of all red nations until pride pushed the Iroquois up to the highest prestige, brought up the rear of the undulating procession.

"There is the runaway Englishman you call Brouwer, the outcast Seneca and the young Frenchman who sang of Anjou," murmured La Blanche.

Soldiers, *coureurs de bois* and savages now began discharging their guns and shouting madly. This uproar was contagious, and warriors who had schemed for the downfall of New France on the Upper Lakes responded with mad rejoicing.

"There are the English prisoners! I see Marion La Fontaine, the French deserter! Ah, it will be bad for him," said Carcajou. "I count twenty-nine white men and five Indians as prisoners. Three Mohawks and two Mohicans."

La Blanche told his companion—

"Our savages will wish to roast the Mohawks if they keep up this madness."

"La Fontaine is in worse trouble," murmured Carcajou. "Denonville wants him.

Caught between our people and the savages, he should see death sitting beside him."

That the capture had not been made without a struggle was shown by the bloody heads and torn clothing of both French and English. And there were broken bones. Hemming in the twenty canoes of the captured outfit were the canoes of the Ottawas and Hurons. When the head of the fleet made land the soldiers and *coureurs de bois* immediately spread out to surround the prisoners. Carcajou started to join them, knowing the maneuver was intended to prevent the Indians from attacking the helpless band or attempting a rescue. La Blanche caught his arm and whispered:

"Wait. We may do more good back here. Durantaye fears the Hurons may try to rescue the English. They paddled out to meet and join them, but the Ottawas stopped it. The French are in as much danger as their prisoners. If a move is made we will try to break it up back here before it can take head."

Many of the Huron men on landing withdrew in a body and appeared to be very sullen. The Indians who had remained at the point sensed the tension and, although eager to get at the rum, were inclined to hold back until they knew how the situation stood. It was Nansoaskouet, an Ottawa chief, who took the initiative in holding the peace. With thirty men he stood between the prisoners and the sullen Hurons and loudly proclaimed:

"No one shall help Onontio's prisoners. If a man tries to do that he will lose his women and children. There is strong water and presents for all."

This bold warning caused the Huron men, who were in the minority, to give up any plan they might have formed against the French. They fell back.

Speaking in poor French, Captain Johannes Rooseboom, a young Dutchman from Albany, fiercely demanded of Durantaye:

"Before all these people I again demand to know what is the meaning of this outrage? Are you Frenchmen pirates?"

"Monsieur knows he has no license to trade in New France," coldly replied Durantaye. "Nor can he influence the Indians to help him."

"New France?" bitterly jeered Rooseboom. "So a Frenchman calls it New France wherever his feet happen to walk."

"If he calls it so he will hold it so against all the English," warmly declared Durantaye.

"Now that Monsieur Rooseboom has set the style our feet may wander to Albany," spoke up Tonty.

"I demand my release and the release of my men," said Rooseboom.

"That is something our royal masters must talk about. You'll go to Montreal or Quebec before you see New York Province again," answered Durantaye.

To Tonty he directed—

"Have them taken inside the stockade and securely guarded."

To Du Lhut:

"Distribute some rum to our red brothers. And tell them we will make many presents after we have landed and examined the goods."

Loudly complaining against what he declared to be an unspeakable outrage, Captain Rooseboom and his men were conducted inside the stockade. He preferred to remain with his men to accepting the hospitality of the officers' quarters, Brouwer, Chartier and Dead Bear the Seneca trailed after Durantaye and Tonty. Carcajou joined the band of *coureurs de bois*, among whom were Turcot, Dubeau, the Pickard, and John Black.

Already Carcajou was remembering a promise made to Perrot, one that that great leader had laughed at. And never did a wolverene's eyes shine with greater anticipation than did those of the bush loper as he gazed on the twenty long canoes filled with trade goods and rum. Rooseboom had brought a big outfit to the western trade.

"Stand back. You will have your presents and rum soon," said Du Lhut as Carcajou pressed closer to the loaded canoes, now nosing into the bank in a long line.

Covered by the long blanket, he had been mistaken for a curious Ottawa or Huron. La Blanche gripped his arm for silence. Du Lhut was paying them no further attention. But Dubeau happened to glance at him and caught a glimpse of the strong, predatory nose showing between the folds of the blanket. For a moment he looked puzzled, then smothered a knowing grin. Lounging away from his mates, he mingled with the Indians and gained a position behind Carcajou and whispered in his ear:

"Hide that big nose, my friend. And when do we finish our little fight?"

Without moving a muscle Carcajou asked in Ottawa—

"Is it black or white wampum between us?"

"White. White to the death. But we must fight again. If you refuse I shall hate you. If you fight, I will love you."

"I will break your thick neck sometime. Now follow me into the village and tell me something."

Dubeau, much pleased by the threat, lounged after him until the lodges hid them from the shore. Carcajou pulled the blanket from his face and anxiously asked—

"Will the Ottawas stand by us?"

Dubeau shrugged his massive shoulders and muttered:

"Who can tell what those children will do? Nansoaskouet is holding them in hand now. But Durantaye is a fool to feed them rum. The Hurons would have turned against us on the lake after we met the English if it had been for Nansoaskouet. And even he may change his mind over night. So I say it is bad to give them rum. The Hurons are hungry for English trade and favors. My mother was a Huron. I know. But Durantaye has been looking for you. Where did you run to?"

"I did not run. I went to warn Nicolas Perrot of a Fox plot against his life. Do the Indians believe I killed any of them?"

Dubeau's small eyes lighted with amusement. "That is the queer part of it. Some one told the commandant that. He ran around trying to find you. But the Ottawas and Hurons do not believe it. If they had you'd have had an ax sticking in your head before we beached our canoes. But when can we begin our fun? I'm wanting to take you apart and see how you're hitched together, my friend."

"You shall have your chance very soon. But next time I shall not be easy with you."

"Even if I have to kill you I shall call you my brother," cried Dubeau admiringly. "Now I'll be going back to get some of the rum."

"Don't run. Tell me if any trade is expected to arrive at the point."

"There are some Saulteurs (Chippewas) at the Sault. They should be coming in soon," said Dubeau. "But Durantaye will not stop to trade with them. He must be off at once to whip the Iroquois. You'd better keep out of his path."

"I will laugh in his face after Nicolas Perrot comes."

Dubeau appeared to be surprized. "An Ottawa man came to the point the day before we sailed down the lake and said Perrot had no Indians. That is why we did not wait for him. He said the Foxes, Kickapoos and Mascoutens had listened to a Loup talk and wouldn't follow Perrot."

"If they refuse to come it will be because they are not canoe-Indians and would have to join the Miamis, who are also 'walkers,' and come across country to Detroit. They are afraid the Iroquois will have men down there to trap them."

"The Ottawa man brought a different talk. He said the Indians were afraid the French would hitch them up like cattle after whipping the Iroquois and would make them drag plows."

"Whatever the Ottawa said was a poor talk," coldly observed Carcajou. "But the Potawatomi, the Menominees and the Winnebagoes will come with Perrot. He will be here any day now. *Pardieu!* Wait till he gives a talk to these Ottawas and treacherous Hurons. He'll talk the thick hide off their backs. And M'sieur Durantaye will go slow when it comes to mistreating a friend of Perrot."

"He should step very softly before doing that," agreed Dubeau with a grin. "But you'd better keep the blanket over that big head till your friend arrives. Now I must go back. There will be much rum and fighting. Better keep out of my path after I begin drinking unless you are ready for a fight."

"I will hide till it's safe to show my head," mocked Carcajou. "And the Saulteurs? They are at the Sault and have the winter hunt with them to trade?"

"That is so. They may have held back because some Huron talk reached them about the English coming with a good trade and higher prices. I would laugh if they came, thinking the English had crowded the French off the point."

Dubeau ran back to the shore. Carcajou cast about until he found La Blanche. The old man was talking with several Ottawa men. Getting him aside, he asked—

"Will they tell the fort I am here?"

"They will say nothing. I shall steal an extra keg of rum for them. But the soldier has told by this time."

"*Eh, bien.* Who cares? I snap my fingers at Durantaye. Perrot will come tomorrow;

or next day. Then I'll wear eagle feathers in my hair. But you will steal no rum tonight. You will work very hard for your Carcajou."

"*Que diable!* Not steal rum? What are you saying? There is an ocean of it. I'll swim in it!"

"Nothing of the kind, Old Foolish. You will help me get some of the trade goods. It is not stealing to take goods from the English. Those twenty canoes are worth eight thousand beaver.* A few won't be missed, Old Nonsense."

"Eight thousand beaver!" gasped La Blanche; and he endeavored to translate that amount into wives and brandy. "I make war on the accursed English. I will help you. Father Marquette, buried here at the point, will help us."

"Be still. Father Marquette was not a trader. Don't bother him with foolish prayers. Yet I shall give many candles to the missions on the lakes if the Saulteurs bring in their winter hunt and I can trade for it. Hear that? Du Lhut is giving out the rum." The last as a fierce shout sounded from the shore.

THEY hurried through the empty Ottawa village and beheld the Ottawa men and women eagerly pressing forward to be served. They carried various kinds of utensils, ranging in size from gourds to kettles. In the background were grouped the Hurons, thirsting for the strong liquor and angry at being discriminated against. One of their men advanced with a gourd and sullenly presented it to be filled.

Du Lhut told him:

"Go to your friends, the English, if you want something warm to drink. You will find them tied up inside the stockade." The man fell back.

Nansoaskouet warned:

"Some should be given the Hurons. It will warm their hearts. They are few and the Ottawas are many. They will stay in their village and drink. If they do not have something to drink they will not stay in their village and will hurt some one before morning."

Du Lhut rapidly considered this advice. The French were deeply indebted to the chief for possibly preventing a hostile demonstration on the part of the Hurons.

"If my son will answer for them they shall have something to drink," he decided.

Nansoaskouet ran with a gourd of rum to the scowling Hurons, held it to the mouth of one of their leaders and announced:

"Our brothers' hearts shall be warmed. Onontio was afraid you would forget yourselves and throw axes if you drank. Your brother has told him you would not be so foolish.

"You have women and children here. Your village is here. There is no place for you to spread your robes if you leave this place. The English are very weak men. They let themselves be caught. They paddled into a trap with their eyes open. They must be blind men. Many presents will be made after another sleep."

This talk, for the time being at least, dispelled all thoughts of treachery; and with glad cries the Hurons swarmed forward with vessels and were given some of the English rum. Papa La Blanche was in the procession, carrying a big cooking kettle. Carcajou would have held back had not Dubeau grinned broadly and motioned him to advance. With the blanket over his head and a gourd in each hand he thoroughly delighted the half-breed by so maneuvering as to receive a double ration.

Du Lhut at last ordered that the rest of the rum be carried inside the fort. He told the Indians to feast and be happy and added that on the morrow they would receive much of the goods. This satisfied them, for the rum was more important than cloth and trinkets. With ferocious cries they ran back to their villages, spilling liquor as they ran, pausing to drink and to force drams on each other; in short, acting like so many madmen.

Old Papa awkwardly made his way clear of the howling mob and retreated some distance from the village. There Carcajou found him sitting on a keg.

He kicked his heel against it and explained:

"It was in my way. I picked it up and put it under my blanket so I would not trip and fall over it."

"You old thief! See here. You cache that keg. Then I will help you drink it. But you must be sober tonight. Du Lhut is having the canoes moved up the shore and nearer to the fort. They will carry some of the goods inside the palisade."

"They are simple. Why carry only part of them inside?" asked La Blanche.

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*A fact.

Carcajou swung his gaze to the low sun and estimated the amount of daylight left.

"There is our share," he explained. "I do not want my goods inside the stockade. You and I will work hard and fast tonight. Then we will drink our heads off."

Papa La Blanche regretfully cached the keg. The confusion in the Huron and Ottawa villages was increasing rapidly. Men darted among the lodges, shrieking and dancing. A skin lodge caught fire, and the savages danced around this like so many evil spirits. One man fell insensible on a pile of burning bark and none offered to rescue him until his scalplock was burned off and the side of his head was roasted.

Contrary to Nansoaskouet's assurance to Du Lhut, the Hurons were not remaining in their village, but were visiting the Ottawas. Men from the two tribes vowed eternal friendship to each other and at the same time fumbled for their knives. The Ottawa camp guard, posted to keep the peace, who were supposed to refrain from the debauch, had deserted this necessary office and were drinking.

The women, seeing the men still had their arms, contrary to the customary agreement, began stealthily withdrawing to the forest and taking their children with them. The dogs were quick to sense danger and deserted the villages.

The sun went down as the last of Rooseboom's canoes was shifted nearer the fort. Soldiers began unloading the trade goods; but although they moved briskly in carrying the goods inside the stockade they were slow to reappear. Carcajou was pleased to believe they were pausing to drink the captured rum after each trip. Seated aloof, with blanket over his head, he drank thoughtfully from a gourd of liquor and kept watch that Papa La Blanche did not imbibe too deeply.

Dusk came, and the sweet voice of young Chartier was heard in the officers' quarters, singing a *chansonnette*. It made the Wolverene feel very sentimental, and his bold eyes were moist as he listened. The singing also slowed up the work of unloading the canoes, for *coureurs de bois* lingered over their keg inside the stockade to listen and applaud.

"It grows dark fast. It is time we were at work, Old Papa," decided Carcajou as he carefully propped the gourd between two pieces of driftwood. "We must cache the goods west of the fort and near the water."

"There is a medicine place the Indians never visit close to the water," said La Blanche. "It's a short paddle there."

Carcajou led the way to the north a quarter of a mile, then swung around to the west and returned to the strait on the west side of the fort and at the point where they had left their canoe. Cloud masses were blotting the stars from the western sky. Without a word they placed the canoe in the water and paddled cautiously along the shore until they were abreast of the English canoes. A flare of light at the entrance to the stockade permitted them to make out the dark silhouettes of several figures staggering under heavy packs of goods and from the effects of the rum.

As the last of the carriers entered the stockade Carcajou with reckless daring shot his canoe inshore and slipped overboard. Seizing an English canoe, he dragged it into the water; and while Papa La Blanche was securing the tow line he waded back and floated another. This was quickly fastened to the first, and Carcajou joined his companion and the two paddles made short work of conveying the stolen goods down the shore. They advanced scarcely more than half a mile when La Blanche announced:

"This is it. It is a medicine place. Here Chipiapoos, brother of Nanabozho, buried the first dead man, the Algonquians say. He was an unfortunate spirit, but very gentle. His work is to guard the dead. Perhaps we'd better go farther and find another spot."

"Your mind has turned red, Old Foolish. Chipiapoos, being gentle, won't hurt us. We only borrow enough room to hold a few English goods for a short time. So we'll work as if the evil one was chasing us. Help get them ashore. Then we'll take the empty canoes back and they'll think the Ottawas or Hurons stole them. Don't stop to hide them now. We'll do that later."

The cargoes were broken out, and the bales and packs were quickly unloaded. When they crawled up near the stranded canoes three men were starting for the stockade and singing lustily as they made their uneven way. The two canoes had not been missed. Carcajou waded ashore, drew the empty canoes up beside the others and calmly dragged two loaded ones into the water. Two men came from the stockade before these were secured by towlines. Carcajou stood patiently up to his waist in water and waited. The men were half-drunk and paused only long enough to pick up a light load and hurry back to the keg.

Carcajou leisurely and carefully drew himself in over the end of his canoe while La Blanche tied the towlines. Reaching their landing place, they made short work of getting the goods ashore. Then Carcajou with much satisfaction said:

"This stuff is worth eight hundred beaver in regular trade. With Durantaye and the *coureurs de bois* going to fight the Iroquois we should trade it for a thousand beaver as there won't be a post open for trade on the Upper Lakes until the fighting is finished. So, Old Thief, lead the way to the medicine place."

The night was thick; but La Blanche was red in his sense of location, and he unerringly walked to a stunted growth surrounding a rough outcropping of rocks. Carcajou felt about and found holes and crevices. Carcajou told him to remain and hide the goods.

He took it upon himself to bring them from the shore, and each trip he carried enough to satisfy the strength of three average men. When he finished he was as wet from sweat as if he had plunged into the strait. At last he paused, wiped the water from his face and sighed:

"Praise all the holy saints! That is done. A quicker trading venture I never made, Old Nonsense. Now we will take the empty canoes back and get some more."

"We've done enough," muttered La Blanche. "Are you a madman? Do you think you can steal the fort and the point?"

But on their return this time they found two men violently arguing. They had endeavored to count the empty canoes to ascertain how many had been unloaded. One man insisted the string was short one canoe. The other as forcibly declared the count was three short.

Carcajou waited a short distance from the shore. He feared lest the loud argument would bring an officer from the fort with a torch. Finally the two agreed to bring a third man from the stockade to settle the dispute. As they moved away Carcajou was in the water and restoring the empty canoes to the line. He had barely rejoined La Blanche when the disputants reappeared, this time accompanied by an officer who carried a flaring torch.

"M'sieur, I have told this pig one is missing," cried one soldier.

"*Cochon!* M'sieur the officer will find three are gone," cried the other.

"Stop your noise," growled the officer. "If you've called me out here for nothing you'll catch it."

He swung the torch around over his head and brightly lighted the shore line. In disgust he said:

"None are missing, you miserable wretches. You're so drunk you can't count."

He swung the torch again and surveyed the canoes. Then he muttered:

"You've worked fast. But there are not enough goods in the stockade to fill all these empties."

He started for the fort, and Carcajou would have slipped into the water had not La Blanche gripped him by the long hair and hissed:

"Is something the matter with your head? The man is suspicious. He's gone to count the bales in the stockade."

Carcajou wrathfully demanded his companion to release his double grip, but La Blanche was obdurate; and his wisdom was proven by the sudden reappearance of the officer accompanied by two soldiers carrying muskets. He angrily accused:

"Some one has been stealing these goods. We'll find the thief in the morning."

"It must be some of the Ottawas or Hurons," said a soldier.

"They're all drunk. It's some of the cursed woods runners. But we'll get them yet. You men start a fire. Keep it burning. If you see a thief, shoot. I'll send some of the soberest men to finish unloading."

Carcajou dipped his paddle noiselessly, and the canoe glided along the shore until La Blanche told him to stop. It was a natural hiding place, close to the water. The canoe was landed and thrust under some low bushes. Then in a wide detour they passed around the fort and emerged from the woods back of the screaming Ottawa village.

"I stay here," decided Carcajou. "They've got their knives and are fighting."

"If they kill each other they will blame the French for giving them the rum. If they hadn't got the rum they would have killed the French to get it," sighed La Blanche.

THE morning brought a woful sight to those who wandered among the lodges. Warriors who were famed for their prowess on the hunt and warpath were scattered about like grotesque wooden figures, only their stertorous breathing showed they still lived. Many were wounded; some were savagely disfigured. And there were five men and a woman who were dead, killed by their excessive potations. Had not the liquor, while inciting homicidal lusts, destroyed concerted action many more would have died from violence. Women began stealing back to the lodges at sunrise to search for their men.

The men at the fort, used to the liquor, swam in the cold waters of the strait and prepared to distribute some of the English goods to the villages. Durantaye had been informed that some of the goods had been stolen but did not care to accuse the Indians of the theft. Late in the forenoon Du Lhut with several *coureurs de bois* and others visited the villages to arrange for immediate distribution. What ordinarily would have been an occasion of great joy was marked by apathy and sullenness. Many of the Indians were sick, others were nursing wounds, and there were the dead.

Du Lhut announced that the dead would be covered with many presents. Nor were the Hurons discriminated against. Nansoaskouet, who had passed the night at the fort, harangued his people and told them they were sick from drinking the strong waters of the English and that in the future they must drink only what the French brought to Mackinac.

Some of the Ottawas insisted that the Mohawks and Mohicans be given them to burn. The Hurons were willing to burn the Mohicans but were opposed to harm the people of the Long House. Du Lhut announced that white and red prisoners would be taken to Montreal, where Onontio would decide their fate. Meanwhile Durantaye was busy at the fort, preparing to set forth again.

Du Lhut hurried the giving of gifts and suitably covered the dead. Shortly after midday the distribution had been completed, and Du Lhut and his following were about to return to the fort when a terrible wailing was heard in the woods beyond the village.

"Some one cries for the dead," said Nansoaskouet, his eyes glittering.

"They have found another man who has died from drinking the strong waters of the English," said Du Lhut. "Everything from the English is bad. The strong waters of the French make men brothers. We will cover the bones of the dead."

The wailing grew louder, and Nansoaskouet insisted:

"No. This is bad. Men are crying for the dead. Only women cried for those dead from the English drink."

Du Lhut's face grew troubled as he perceived the chief was much disturbed. As several men came from the woods carrying burdens on poles Nansoaskouet told the trader:

"Go back to the fort. Here is something that must be talked about. It is bad. It is something a chief must talk."

The attention of Ottawas and Hurons was concentrated on the men approaching from the woods. Du Lhut fell back toward the fort with his companions. Nansoaskouet remained. From behind a silent mass of Ottawas Carcajou watched the situation develop. Papa La Blanche whispered:

"You are not safe here, my little one. The Seneca said something about you to Du Lhut. The Ottawas may turn against you when the dead are brought up."

"*Ma foi!* I don't know that I would be safe at the fort even if M'sieur Durantaye loved me like a brother," muttered Carcajou. "I can't go into the woods and hide in a tree. I think the Ottawas are more friendly to me than they are to the fort. I can give them a strong talk."

"They know you are Perrot's man. The Ottawas love Perrot when they are not planning to cut his throat," said La Blanche. "But I don't like this business."

He left his companion and advanced with a score of warriors to meet the howling stretcher bearers. They were bringing two Ottawa men, each dead from an ax wound in the head.

Pandemonium was loosed as the sorry burdens were placed on the grass in view of all.

"Onontio's men killed them! Onontio's axes killed them!" yelled the infuriated Ottawas.

Nansoaskouet's stentorian voice cried out:

"Onontio does not give guns and new coats and blankets to men he would kill. Onontio does not reach one hand to lead you against the Iroquois and then strike you down with his other hand. This is bad work of some one who wants to turn you against Onontio and his children."

The chorus of hate died down somewhat. All became quiet as a new figure, that of the Rat, the Tionontati chief, came through the crowd and stared at the dead men. Then he said:

"These men were killed by French axes. A Tionontati man was killed on the Detroit by a French ax. A few suns ago Ottawa men were found dead in this village—killed by a French ax. A bad medicine is working here. We are asked to carry Onontio's club against the Iroquois, but our men are killed by French axes."

Nansoaskouet pointed a finger at Carcajou and demanded:

"Where was Onontio's runaway son last night? Let us look at his ax. The men at the fort hunted for him the night he ran away. That was the night two of our men were found killed."

Ferocious eyes were turned on Carcajou. Without turning his head the Rat replied:

"The white wolverene does not kill his red brothers. He covers them with presents when another kills them. He was with the Tionontati men at the Detroit when a man was killed. He covered the dead. Why should he kill them?"

This unexpected support gave Carcajou much comfort; the more so because the Rat had wanted to make him a prisoner at the Narrows. Had he known the Rat was to arrive at the point that morning he would have felt uneasy. As all, except the Rat, stared at him he clapped a hand on La Blanche's shoulder and said:

"This man will talk for me. I have killed only enemies of the Ottawas and Hurons. Their villages are places where I can rest and sleep and not be afraid."

La Blanche immediately stepped forward and in a raucous voice proclaimed:

"The white wolverene has not left my side since we came to the point together. Would I be his brother if he killed my red fathers? They ask for him at the fort, and he covers his head with a blanket and hides among his red brothers until Onontio's great son, Perrot, can come and take his hand. For many winters you have known me. I do not walk in the woods with a man who kills my red people."

Carcajou drew his ax, handed it to Nansoaskouet and said:

"All the Ottawa blood I have made run is now on that ax. I do not know who killed the Tionontati and the Ottawas. My medicine will tell me before we reach the Niagara."

This promise gave a new turn to red thought and speech. The Rat promptly announced:

"The Tionontati will not go to Montreal until they know for whom the Iroquois kettles are waiting. We come here to find out what this talk about the French dying in Montreal and Quebec of the big sickness—smallpox—means. They say Onontio is sick and weak and will give us to the Iroquois so the Long House will stop burning white lodges on the St. Lawrence."

"They tell lies," spoke up Carcajou. "Some enemy brings that talk to hold you back while he strikes Onontio. There is no sickness on the St. Lawrence. I came from there when the ice was leaving the rivers. But there are many birches there to carry soldiers to the Western Door of the Long House.

"A strong Onontio will lead in place of a weak Onontio. This time the Iroquois will have to make a big fight. They will not dare to send their fighting men to strike your villages again. Your father, Perrot, will be here in two sleeps. He sent me ahead to stay with you and talk to you. When he comes and talks with the fort people they will take the white wolverene by the hand. You hear the son of Perrot talking. He will go to the Niagara and show you how a wolverene kills the Iroquois."

This speech displeased the Rat, who had stood sponsor for the bush loper; it pleased Nansoaskouet, who had been willing to turn suspicion against him. The Ottawa chief had allied himself with the French and was anxious to overcome the animosity of the Hurons and lead their warriors with his down the lakes. The Rat was sincere in distrusting the French, just as he was in liking Carcajou. So, although displeased at the strange quirk the situation had taken, he would not weaken his defense of the bush loper.

La Blanche nudged Carcajou's elbow in warning. From the corner of his eye the latter beheld a small group of French officers standing on the edge of the crowd. Brouwer and Chartier were with them, and behind the young Frenchman stood the rescued galley slave. Durantaye advanced to Carcajou and harshly demanded, "What are you doing here in a blanket, bush loper?"

"Nicolas Perrot sent me to help raise the Indians against the Iroquois. I was with him when he got your message about the Ottawas being killed. He knew I had nothing to do with it. He knows I am a very brave man. He knows I risked my life many times in carrying word to him that the Foxes were planning to rob his post and kill all the French on the Upper Lakes."

"We heard something about the Foxes. I sent a writing to Monsieur Perrot warning him against the Foxes."

"The runner must have lost his way or been killed, m'sieur."

"Have you a message from Perrot?"

"No written talk. He will be here in a day or two, bringing a band of Potawatomi men."

"Why didn't you report to me at the fort?"

"M'sieur was gone when I came. Had he been at the fort there was his threat to put me in irons. M'sieur Perrot wanted me free to help raise the Indians."

Durantaye continued, "I heard enough to know the Ottawas do not blame you for their dead men."

"Hurons and Ottawas and the Tionontati are my friends, m'sieur," assured Carcajou.

"*Pardi!* You have more red friends than I have. What do you say, chevalier?" and he turned to Tonty, who had edged forward.

Tonty rubbed his chin with his metal hand and replied:

"He gave them a good talk. If he comes from Monsieur Perrot it is important we talk with him alone."

"It is a talk for French ears," agreed Carcajou. "The Ottawas will not follow the chief in any numbers. The Hurons are still hostile. The Rat is suspicious. If m'sieur will permit I will say that M'sieur Perrot is the only man who can raise them. And even he will need all the help Carcajou can give him."

Tonty smiled grimly. Du Lhut joined them and in a low voice said—

"The Seneca man says to ask this fellow if he saw anything of the missing goods."

Tonty laughed aloud. Durantaye's brows wrinkled, and he stared suspiciously at the calm face of Carcajou. The latter gently said—

"Is one of the greatest *coureurs de bois* to be questioned on the whim of a galley slave?"

Durantaye swallowed his growing anger. The Seneca's hint gave a plausible explanation of the mysterious disappearance of the goods. But a climax was developing on the Niagara. The bush loper might be a valuable aid. Tonty told him the Indians were growing uneasy and suspicious of the talk in French.

The commandant spoke briefly to the warriors, telling them he wished to clear away all suspicion, that the white wolverene was not guilty of the several murders. Then he turned toward the fort and motioned for Carcajou to follow him. Papa La Blanche fell in beside his friend. Brouwer pressed forward and attempted to talk to the bush-loper, but was discouraged by the reminder:

"There was something said about a stolen belt, M'sieur Runaway. We can't even talk about sturgeon-fishing."

His reception of Chartier's advances was different. He smiled with pleasure and greeted him:

"And how is young M'sieur de Niagara standing our lake weather? Is it the strong winds, or English rum that paints so much vermillion on his face?"

"Monsieur believes he is facetious," haughtily replied the young man.

Then very boyishly he confessed:

"But I am glad to see you again. And I never believed any of those stories about dead Indians. I threatened to spit that beast Turcot through the throat for daring to suggest it. But you do wrong, monsieur, to hold a distant attitude toward Monsieur Brouwer, who always speaks you fair."

"Except when he accused me of stealing a filthy Huron belt," said Carcajou.

ONCE inside the stockade, where the English and Indian prisoners were closely guarded, Carcajou was ordered to stand in attendance while Papa La Blanche was being questioned. Then Pickard and Brown, the renegade, were there, jeering at the prisoners. The sturdy young Dutch leader gave no heed to the rough banter. With one exception the others followed his example in indifference and slept, or pretended to. But there was death in the face of Marion La Fontaine. As Carcajou halted near him he whispered—

"Help me, Frenchman."

"How can I? You're a prisoner."

"Prison for the others for a short time. Death for me."

"Nonsense. Frenchmen will not kill Frenchmen. A trip to Montreal and turned loose in a few months," encouraged Carcajou, who did not believe La Fontaine would pay the extreme penalty for taking up his abode in Dongan's colony.

"If I do not escape I shall never live to see Montreal."

"Stand back there! No talking with the prisoners!" cried an officer.

Papa La Blanche's aged face wore a smirk of satisfaction as he emerged from the fort. He ran to Carcajou and boasted:

"Old Papa has explained everything. He has painted you as mightier than Nanabozho. Tail of a beaver! If you could have seen their eyes stick out as I told of the Fox camp!"

The bush loper caught him by thigh and shoulder and held him over his head, then dropped him lightly on his feet and said—

"I hope you have not talked me into my grave or into an iron cage, Old Foolish."

"Carcajou!" called a soldier from the door of the fort.

Durantaye's bearing was amiable. Carcajou without prompting told a lively story of his adventures on Lake Michigan and La Baye, and gave important information regarding the fickle attitude of certain tribes at the bay. Durantaye had heard of the Loups' successful efforts to discourage certain tribes from taking the long path against the Iroquois, but this disappointment was offset by the bush loper's assurance that Perrot would bring some Potawatomi men with him and would induce many of the Ottawas at the point to join him.

"We will hope that," sighed the commandant. "If Monsieur Perrot can not raise them, then no one can."

"He did it in eighty-four. He will do it now," confidently declared Tonty.

"He should have no trouble with me to help him, monsieur," modestly said Carcajou.

Tonty showed his teeth in an ugly grin and said:

"You'd make a good man for me if I could have you out in the woods alone long enough to break you in. How many men did you say would be necessary to take you down the lakes?"

"I will be at the Niagara before the army kills an Iroquois," replied Carcajou.

Durantaye eyed him thoughtfully and slowly said:

"Possibly no one mortal knows what you have to answer for, bush loper. I shall have to leave you here to tell Monsieur Perrot what has happened. I will believe you will wait here until Monsieur Perrot arrives and will come with him."

"He couldn't stir from the point without me," loudly declared Carcajou. "We will be with you before the first ax is thrown. M'sieur Perrot is my second father. He will keep me out of the cage on Cape Diamond."

"Then see to it you do nothing more to arouse the resentment of Monseigneur the governor," harshly warned Durantaye.

There followed much bustling and hurrying as the fleet of canoes were inspected and made ready, as supplies were assembled and the prisoners prepared for the long journey. Nansoaskouet again embarked with his original force but slightly augmented. Many of the Ottawas now declared they would not pick up an ax until their father, Perrot, arrived to advise and lead them. The Hurons, who had taken the path for the purpose of deserting to the English, again painted for war and put their canoes in the water.

Neither Durantaye nor the Hurons themselves knew whether they were to help smash the Western Door of the Long House or turn on the French and massacre them. The latter possibility was to depend on how thoroughly the one hundred and fifty *coureurs de bois* and the soldiers kept on the alert. If the Hurons could be led to the Iroquois without a mutiny they would fight the Long House.

As Durantaye was getting into his canoe Carcajou waded alongside and whispered:

"Beware of the Hurons. Have them and the Ottawas leave their canoes on Lake Huron and go overland to Teiaiagon* and join you at Niagara.

"See that you overtake us at Niagara," Durantaye answered.

Brouwer, Turcot, Chartier and Dead Bear, the Seneca, were embarking. The young Frenchman waved his hand in farewell to the bush loper. Nansoaskouet's men and the Hurons were racing their canoes back and forth, firing their guns and wasting powder.

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*Name of Ancient Indian village at gate of modern Toronto.

Carcajou told La Blanche:

"To see them shoot powder foolishly one would think they were Iroquois and the English had given them a barrel, even as they give a barrel to the Iroquois to use against the Illinois."

"They may be shooting bullets into French heads before this is ended," muttered the old man.

Dubeau came up behind Carcajou, picked him off the ground, tossed him aside and said—

"Out of the way, little wild-cat."

"I will break your big bones for that," cheerfully promised Carcajou.

The Pickard and Brown and the rest of the *coureurs de bois* swaggered down to the shore, still showing effects of the night's debauch and sounded warwhoops and jeered at the prisoners.

La Fontaine caught Carcajou's eye and framed two words with his silent lips. But the Wolverene read them—

"Help me."

A Jesuit priest trailed his black gown down to the shore and gave the savage company his blessing and with bowed head slowly walked away.

Durantaye gave the order to start. The *coureurs de bois* started a drunken chorus and set to work with their paddles. Each man was stripped to the waist and had a red cloth tied around his head. The Indians ceased firing guns and began singing their war songs. Then the milling mass of canoes straightened out and commenced bobbing across the strait.

Papa La Blanche cheered in a cracked voice and exulted—

"Who can stand against them?"

"The Iroquois," muttered Carcajou, scowling savagely. "Denonville needs *habitants* and more *coureurs de bois*. He will have soldiers fresh from France. So many sheep. It is very difficult, Old Foolish, for a king to learn anything. Well, Old Papa, we must go down there like honest Frenchmen and get ourselves killed if need be. So be quick with your wife-hunting here. M'sieur Perrot may come any time."

"I have an understanding with a lonely Ottawa woman. And I have some of the rum hidden. Shall we drink before I go to call on my wife?"

"We now become *coureurs de derouine*.* We will dig out the trade goods instead of your rum, my boy. I must get some furs to cover some dead men."

"These villages have traded with the fort. They have nothing."

"There are Saulteurs at the Sault who haven't traded their winter hunt. We can go to them. Dubeau told me. He is a good fellow. I shall hurt him when we fight again. Or the Saulteurs may come in at any time. Yes; that will be better. I will send a runner to the Sault and another by water, to hurry them along. Nansoaskouet also said they were at the Sault with a trade. He said they were to come here to light the Third fire. And there's no doubt that I must get rid of those goods before Perrot comes to see things."

La Blanche twisted his thin scalp-lock around a long, thin finger, and suddenly asked:

"But who killed the Ottawas and the Tionontati man, my little one? That must be settled, or this point will become a bad medicine place and no tribe will bring a trade here."

"I am remembering that, my boy. I'll find the truth before we see the Iroquois country. I am living for one thing, Old Foolish. For the time when I can go to M'sieur Perrot and tell him:

" 'I come to prove my cunning. To show I am a wolverene.' "

"And then?"

"Why, then I will prove my cunning by showing who killed our red brothers so as to turn the tribes up here against the French."

CHAPTER VIII

TRADE AND MAY-APPLES

THERE was no need to send word to the Indians at the Sault, as they began arriving at the point almost before the fleet of canoes were lost to sight. Their reception at the Ottawa and Huron villages was indifferent. Many of the Indians were deathly sick from their debauch, and the women were either hiding in fear or loudly wailing for their dead. The Saulteurs were much disappointed. They had brought in the winter hunt only to find the fort guarded by a few soldiers and no trade awaiting them.

Papa La Blanche lost no time, once the visitors left the villages, to talk with their leaders, and as a result the entire band followed him down the west shore a short distance beyond the medicine place. They were happy to behold Carcajou and a large pile of goods.

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*A trader who travels to find trade instead of waiting for it to be brought to a post.

Carcajou was impatient to complete his venture before some caprice on the part of Durantaye's savages compelled the "army" to return to the point, or before the Ottawas and Hurons shook off their sickness and discovered the trade being offered. Yet the bush loper betrayed nothing of his worry and took time to address the hunters and to explain that all the posts on the Upper Lakes were closed to trade until the Iroquois had been whipped. By the especial favor of Onontio, he told them, he was permitted as a favorite son to supply the Saulteurs with guns and powder and lead and goods at the Montreal prices.

The Saulteurs, raised from despondency to great joy, patted him and called him brother, and the trade was opened. Whereas he had been deliberate in his talk and appeared almost reticent to begin the actual trading, he was soon working desperately fast. He curtailed much of the Indians' enjoyment of lengthy bargaining.

La Blanche, also uneasy, watched against an interruption from the strait or the Indian villages. The price of a trade gun was as many beaver, laid flat and pressed down, as would reach to the muzzle of the long weapon. Being a veteran at the work, he piled and tied the packs and marked them with Perrot's name as fast as they could be assembled. Then he paid the Saulteurs a twenty-five pot keg of rum to carry the packs to the fort.

The sentinel in the stockade gate was astounded to behold the long line of Indians coming in single file, each bowed beneath a heavy burden. Pausing only to advise the Saulteurs to carry their liquor back to the Sault before opening it, he further amazed the man on guard by announcing:

"By order of M'sieur Nicolas Perrot; some of his trade he wishes to leave here till he can remove it."

"But M'sieur Perrot is not here!" cried the sentinel.

"I am not asking you to shelter m'sieur; only to shelter his beaver," Carcajou reminded him.

The goods were admitted and placed in the storeroom, and Carcajou successfully insisted on a receipt for the number of bales. Once this was in his possession the moody expression vanished from his brown face and he became as boisterous as a boy. He ran to the edge of the water and capered and danced until a man at the fort told his companions:

"That man is crazy. They say he has lived in the woods so long he can talk to animals."

"There is evil in him," readily said another. "His eyes are bad. They say he can bewitch the fur off an animal's back, and that when he hunts, one or more wolverenes lead him to honest men's traps."

"He can call wolverenes to him in the woods and make them catch animals and bring them to him," muttered a third. "If you should shoot him dead now, he would change back into a wolverene and run away."

Papa La Blanche, who had gone along with the Sault Indians to see that they did not open their keg in the Ottawa village, finally came back and found his friend sprawled on his back, staring up at the blue sky.

"Big ox!" mumbled La Blanche. "Men are saying you have help from the evil one."

"You are half drunk without being happy. It's a waste of good liquor to pour it down your scraggly throat. What do I care what those pigs say? I stole the English goods from under their drunken eyes and have traded for a fat profit within a mile of the fort. They don't know enough to ask each other where I got the goods."

"They are not so simple as all that, my little one," corrected La Blanche. "You'd find yourself tied up to a post if Old Papa wasn't near to make a talk for you. I told them you got the goods from the sick Ottawas."

"Then they're doubly stupid," laughed Carcajou. "The Ottawas and Hurons spoiled most of their goods while drunk. See here, Old Nonsense, you've disgraced me. You're drunk. Your eyes look like holes burned in a new blanket."

La Blanche remained standing and stared out over the strait, slowly shifting his gaze to the West.

"Bah! you blind old owl. Lie down and sleep off your wickedness," sleepily advised Carcajou. "I feel as restful as a child."

"To rest is good," muttered La Blanche, shading his eyes. It was past the meridian hour, and the sun was splashing the western waters with a dazzling light. "To feel rested as a child is also good. But to be easy in the heart is better, my little one. I hope you will find it easy to explain to M'sieur Perrot, who will beach his canoes shortly."

Like a released spring Carcajou was erect and glaring toward the west. Many canoes had swung in from the southwest and were bobbing toward the point.

"Name of names!" gasped Carcajou. "Now I must wake up and clear my head! You think it is M'sieur Perrot and his Indians, old drunkard?"

"Who else would come from the West?"

Carcajou ran to the edge of the water and fired his rifle. Several plumes of smoke rose above the leading canoes, and then came the dull detonations. A small brass cannon boomed at the fort in welcome to a captain of the West. Carcajou sat down and pressed his head between his hands. After a minute of concentration he glanced up at his companion and sharply ordered:

"Look here, my boy; say nothing about the trading venture. I'll do the talking. You agree to what I say. Father Marquette put some brains in my head!"

The canoe containing Perrot, two Frenchmen and a Potawatomi chief streaked ahead of the others, and before it reached the shore Perrot was shouting:

"Where are the men? Where is Monsieur Durantaye?"

Carcajou rushed into the water to greet the trader, and so great was his boisterous enthusiasm that he plucked him from the canoe and carried him ashore on his shoulder despite Perrot's commands that he set him down. The chief snatched up his medicine bag from the prow of the canoe and leaped ashore.

"Now, you big child, tell me what has happened," said Perrot as he waited for the fleet to come up.

"This very morning M'sieur Durantaye and his men and Indians started for Detroit. If m'sieur did not arrive to follow them at once then Carcajou was to take m'sieur's talk to them, saying when he would be at the Narrows."

"As close as that!" sighed Perrot. "Well, we'll soon be after him. Is that all?"

"He took some thirty English prisoners with him who come up the lakes to trade."

"The English! Prisoners! Why don't you talk?" impatiently prompted Perrot.

Carcajou rapidly filled in the details of the capture and the events following the return of the expedition to Mackinac. When he paused Perrot said—

"If that is all I will find a good camping place for my Potawatomis."

"If m'sieur be so good," mumbled Carcajou, now at the climax of his concern. "I was so bold as to trade your share of the goods to the Saulteurs. I got more than a thousand beaver which I hope m'sieur will approve of. They brought their trade from the Sault after the men had started for Detroit. *Ma foi!* Had you come a bit earlier you could have handled the trade yourself."

"My share of the goods?" Perrot repeated, greatly puzzled. "What are you talking about? I have no goods at the point."

Carcajou hastily explained, making up his facts as he went along. The substance of his story was that there had been a division of the captured goods and that a share had been set aside for Perrot.

"So you see, m'sieur," concluded Carcajou, "you had goods, but now you have some prime beaver. And the beaver is marked with your name and stored in the fort under guard. There are your peltries, and here am I, ready to paddle to the Narrows and tell the m'sieur the commandant that you are coming."

"A thousand beaver! You made a good trade, Carcajou I would not have done better myself. But I scarcely understand yet. Who did Durantaye, Tonty and Du Lhut trade with? Why didn't they trade my share when they traded their own?"

"They traded a little with the Ottawas and Hurons. They gave away some of their goods. But they took extra goods to give away. I gave the Saulteurs a keg of rum——"

"That was right," interrupted Perrot.

"The commandant would not wait for the Saulteurs' trade as there was no knowing when they would come from the Sault. Now Old Papa and I will start for the Narrows at once to say you are coming."

"Not so fast. You walk with me until I have talked with the Ottawas. We will all go together, I expect," said Perrot.

He gave orders to his subordinates and made for the fort.

This delay was not to Carcajou's liking.

He knew it was imperative that he make the Narrows and improvise some explanation concerning the Saulteurs' trade so that Durantaye would not be taken by surprize when Perrot arrived and mentioned the subject. Unlike the wolverene he had jumped without looking, and now discovered he needed time to patch up another story to save the situation.

THEY halted at the fort only long enough for Perrot casually to examine the packs, and then hurried on to the Ottawa village. The unexpected profits were still occupying Perrot's thoughts, for he mused:

"I hardly see why I should make a thousand beaver out of the captured goods. I was not here. I had no hand in capturing the English."

"You are a captain of the West," promptly said Carcajou. "You were not here because you were raising the Indians at the commandant's request. I was your representative. I have done good work here. The division was fair. M'sieur, you will find the Ottawas ugly from the rum. Many got hurt. Some died from too much drink."

"That is bad. It would have been better to give them presents and no rum. Very few of them ever tasted it before. It is stronger than our brandy."

As they neared the village they heard the wailing for the dead. Carcajou came to a halt and said:

"There is one other little matter I have not mentioned, m'sieur. It is best you should know."

"Something more? *Bon Dieu!* Bad, of course."

"Two Ottawas were killed by some one unknown last night. They were killed by axes."

"And you're not in irons?" cried Perrot. "They were killed the night you ran away. They were killed the day you returned. Look here, Carcajou, this makes a bad case against you. How did you get out of it? Why haven't the Ottawas killed you?"

"The Ottawas do not believe I would do such a wicked thing. The rat was here and spoke for me. Nansoaskouet spoke for me. And I promised them that my medicine would discover the assassin before the army reaches the Niagara. And if I don't uncover him, then I'll never call myself a wolverene again!"

The moment Perrot was seen and recognized the men streamed out from the village to greet him and to fraternize with the Potawatomi men who were making camp near by. Young men of both tribes fired guns and arrows over each other's heads and pretended to be at war.

Perrot talked with some of the older men for a few minutes, then produced a calumet and filled it with tobacco and seated himself on the robe Carcajou was prompt to spread. He smoked with the leading men of the Ottawas and then announced his intention of starting at once for Detroit. He said he was sorry to find so many fighting men at the point when they should all be with the commandant and carrying Onontio's big club against the Iroquois.

One man replied that their women did not know how to catch fish. Another said a band of Iroquois was in the Illinois country, waiting for the point men to go to the Niagara and leave their villages unprotected. Perrot listened patiently while these evasive excuses were being given. When they had finished he drew his tomahawk, tossed it on the ground before him and said:

"There is Onontio's ax. Who will pick it up and carry it against the Iroquois?"

The Ottawas stared at it in silence for a few minutes. Then an old man rose and said:

"We have been waiting for Little Indian Corn (Metaminens) to come and wash the dust from our eyes. Our canoes are not ready for the water. Let the ax wait on the ground for a few days. Then we will pick it up and follow you."

Perrot rose, leaving the tomahawk on the ground, and said he would leave the ax for a day or two.

"Then I shall pick it up if the Ottawas have not lifted it," he warned. "It is a good ax. It will not be left to turn red in the rain."

As he turned back to the fort he expressed his belief that the Indians would accompany him as soon as they had overhauled their canoes. Carcajou was politely skeptical and reminded him:

"Nansoaskouet could not stir them. They knew you were coming and would ask them to go with you. If their canoes needed pitch they knew that."

"They are like children. Even my own Potawatomis sent men to the Miamis to tell evil things about me because they were jealous of my seeking the Miami trade. Then again the English rum has made the Ottawas sick. They have forgotten everything they owe to the French. But I believe most of them will go with me.

"They may not touch the ax for a few days. I will wait. It's very important I take them with me. If I can get them to the Niagara then they must stand with us or suffer the vengeance of the Iroquois. If I am delayed here you shall go on ahead to tell Monsieur Durantaye that I am coming."

Carcajou, still unbelieving, left him and turned back among the lodges. He was in time to see several Ottawas walking to the Potowatomi camp, and one of them had a keg of rum under his arm. Catching a glimpse of Papa La Blanche in a lodge, he signaled him to come out. La Blanche, in the act of giving an Ottawa woman a double handful of *rassade*, obeyed with much grumbling.

"Never mind the love-making, Old Nonsense, or I'll ask when you stole the *rassade*. Run as fast as your old legs will carry you to the fort and tell Perrot rum goes into the Potawatomi camp."

La Blanche showed no age in his heels as he made for the fort while Carcajou followed the keg. The rum was placed on the ground in front of the Potawatomis and the bearer began:

"We are all brothers. We are one body and spirit. The French ask us to carry an ax against the Iroquois. If we go with them and whip the Iroquois the French will use us like cattle. They will hitch us to plows and make us dig up the land. Let them do their own fighting. They did not help us when our warriors were prisoners of the Iroquois and made to paddle their canoes by the fort on Montreal and sing their death songs. Where was Onontio's help then? They watched us from the top of the fort. Here is a keg of English strong water. It is better than a French keg. Drink with us."

Perrot came up on the run, flung himself between the two groups and passionately told the Potowatomi:

"My sons, this is the time to show you are men. Listen to the voice of your great father Onontio, who speaks through your little father Metaminens. He tells you to fight the Iroquois, or be killed by the Iroquois.

"Other tribes look down on you. The Ottawas think you are like children or foolish men and will do as they say, even to drinking this bad water. Now you must show yourselves to be brave men. You will be sorry if you do not help carry Onontio's bow and club against the Tsonnontouans—Senecas.

"You are fighting men. Show the other tribes you are not soft and afraid. Do not drink this bad water. It will tie you up and make you prisoners. It will steal away your strength and make you sick. The Englishman is the father of the Iroquois. The English water is poisoned. Ottawa men are dead in their village after drinking it."

The Potawatomi men were strongly impressed by this talk and turned their backs on the keg and the Ottawas. The latter, much taken aback, said nothing as they picked up the keg and withdrew. Perrot commended Carcajou for realizing the danger.

"They were dying to drink the rum," he told the bush loper. "They prefer it to anything else. The Ottawas are up to their old tricks. They are like bad children. But I will stay here a few days. Like all children they are changeable. And yet they are wise in a way. When they know we are starting for the Niagara they will follow, I believe. They will not dare to have it said that they, of all the Upper Lakes tribes, held back from the fighting; for then they would be at the mercy of the tribes, whether we win or lose."

But the menace of the keg was not ended; and how strongly the Potawatomis were being tempted was shown at sundown when one of their men went to Perrot and said the Ottawas had paid a second visit to the camp and had left the keg in a skin lodge and that the Potawatomi men were "afraid of it."

Snatching Carcajou's tomahawk from his belt, Perrot angrily made for the camp and unceremoniously entered the lodge where the liquor had been left. A circle of Potawatomi warriors were seated around the sinister keg. In dead silence each man was staring at it. They were so absorbed in contemplating the keg that they did not appear to know Perrot had entered. The man who had notified him of the danger pointed at the rum and said:

"Onontio's son, Little Indian Corn, can see how it follows us like our shadows.

Some of our men say it will not stop following us until we drink it. What can we we do with it?"

Perrot drew the borrowed ax from the back of his belt, stepped inside the circle and cried:

"Look here, you Potawatomi men! This is what you can do with it. You must do the same with the Iroquois when you are in a fight. You must strike them with an ax just as I strike this keg."

And he smashed in the head of the keg and kicked it over so that all the rum was lost in the ground. Then he handed Carcajou his ax and calmly continued:

"Put pitch on your canoes. After one sleep we start for Detroit. Metaminen will wait no longer for any man."

Leaving the Potawatomi to overhaul their canoes, he visited the Ottawa village and fiercely upbraided the men for cowardice. He taunted them with being afraid of the Iroquois and told them they were fit only to shoot small game and bring wood and water for the women. Having abused them soundly, he returned to the fort and delighted Carcajou by commanding:

"Start as soon as you can for Detroit. Tell Messieurs Durantaye and Tonty I am leaving here inside of twenty-four hours. If my ax is not picked up by then I shall come without the Ottawas. Tell them they need not wait for me as I will overtake them before they make the Niagara."

Papa La Blanche was disgruntled and refused to make the trip. He said he was old and tired of traveling, and that he was about to take a new wife. Carcajou did not stop to argue with him but picked him up and carried him, kicking violently, placed him in the canoe and warned him:

"Be sure I find you here when I return, Old Foolish, or I'll send you back to that Mascouten woman. I go to get the packs and guns."

And when he returned La Blanche was in the canoe and appeared to be quite reconciled to the journey.

THE voyageurs landed at the first camp-fire above the fort and immediately were surrounded by a whooping band of *coureurs de bois.* A circle of flying hands smacked Carcajou mightily on back and shoulders as various old forest acquaintances pressed around him and marveled that there was no fleur-de-lis branded on his cheek. Some uproariously demanded to know how he managed to escape from the galleys.

"How did you get out of the Cape Diamond cage?" yelled the Picard, seizing him by the shoulders and striving to rock him back and forth.

Grinning amiably, Carcajou called out to Dubeau, now working his way through the group:

"Here, you strong man, take this child away. He annoys me."

Dubeau seized the Picard by the shoulder and hurled him aside, bowling over three men. Then he rejoiced:

"You come, Wolverene. I have hunted this camp over, seeking a strong man. These are weak fellows. My muscles ache."

Turning to the boisterous, reckless woods runners, he waved his arms and cried:

"Fall back! Give room to two chiefs. Here is a man who comes to do me great honor before I break his bones. We shall need much room."

Yelling joyously, the men gave ground and formed a huge ring. Carcajou, still smiling, sought to avoid the contest by saying:

"Listen to me, impatient one. I bring a talk to Durantaye. It is very important. Let us put our play off till my work is done. Let us——"

"Let us! Let us!" mocked Dubeau, throwing off his shirt and threshing his mighty arms across his hairy chest. "No, no, my Wolverene. You have a way of running into the woods and hiding. I owe you something for that crack on my head. I have waited too long. You are sly. You would keep me waiting until I am an old man without any teeth and living on potage, and my muscles so many thin strings. Now you've walked into a trap, my Wolverene. You must fight to get out of it. Sharpen your claws."

"That's right! Make him fight, big Dubeau!" shouted John Black.

The Picard, still rubbing his bruised shoulder, urged:

"Break him in two, Carcajou. He's a nuisance. He's been trying to pick a fight with all of us."

"The Wolverene is quick to fight. He says he's a hard fighter," called out another.

Carcajou twisted his head about and beheld the heavy face of Brouwer peering over Turcot's shoulder. Beside him was young Chartier, not quite certain what it all meant. In a dull singsong the men began singing:

"Fight! Fight!"

Chartier's slim figure wriggled to the front of the circle. He caught Carcajou's eye and cried:

"Monsieur, you shall have fair play. Only one at a time shall meet you."

Yells of laughter greeted this.

"Throw the bantam into the water!" cried John Black.

Chartier drew himself up and clapped a hand to his rapier. Jeers instantly turned to snarls. Dubeau snatched him off his feet and slowly advanced to the shore, Chartier frantically striving to loose his weapon. Carcajou barred Dubeau's path, pressed the edge of his palm against the short, thick neck and advised him:

"Old bear, gently place M'sieur de Niagara on his feet. His ways are not ours, but he means well and is not afraid. Down gently, my bear, or you'll get something in your throat that will take all the fight out of you."

Dubeau glared fiercely but did not attempt to back away from the pressure against his throat. Still holding Chartier above his head and ready to hurl him into the water, he hoarsely told Carcajou:

"Three strings of wampum sometimes buys a man's life. Do you offer me a fight, Wolverene, to save this squirrel a wetting?"

Carcajou began to lose his patience and some of his good nature. His one desire was to find Durantaye. He must deliver Perrot's message, and, of more importance in his estimation, he must explain how he had traded the stolen goods. His story was simple and rather bald but the best he had been able to devise during the voyage down the lake.

Chartier's face was pale with rage because of his ignominious plight. Death was preferable to being manhandled. And he had meant well. He had observed the *coureurs de bois* at a distance, as he had lived much with the officers. Failing to understand that so much roughness could be associated with good nature, he had feared that Carcajou would not receive fair play.

"I trade a fight," surrendered Carcajou. "Place him gently on his feet. No man here can stand against him, fighting his way."

"And he tossed his belt of weapons on the ground, handed his rifle to La Blanche and stripped off his shirt.

Dubeau lowered his victim to the ground. Chartier would have pulled his rapier and defied the whole assemblage had not Carcajou seized his arm and assured him:

"It was well meant, my friend. I will remember. But this is a bit of woods play. Stand back there beside Old Papa Simple and watch the fun."

La Blanche was kneeling behind Carcajou's weapons and surreptitiously opening the mouth of his medicine bag. Carcajou wasted no time in preliminaries. Suddenly whirling upon Dubeau, he leaped upon him like a tree-cat, and was all over him and had slipped behind him almost before the breed realized the fight was begun. And as he darted behind him he hooked an arm around the thick neck and violently hurled him to the ground and was dancing out of reach.

Dubeau slowly crawled to his feet and shook his head, for his neck had been severely wrenched by the ferocious onslaught. Grinning shamefacedly, he muttered—

"Next time I'll know when you're coming."

"You'll never know when a wolverene is coming until he has gone," taunted Carcajou, springing in and striking the edge of his iron hand against the base of the breed's nose and eliciting a grunt of rage and pain.

For a moment the small eyes were filled with water, and as Dubeau raised his hand to clear them he found his wrist clasped. Had he forgotten to double his arm his shoulder would have been dislocated. He struck blindly with his free hand, and Carcajou staggered back and wondered if his skull was broken.

"Strike him again, bear! Smash him, bear!" shouted Black.

"Rip his hide off, Wolverene!" cried the Picard.

Carcajou backed away, seeking time to clear his head. Dubeau grinned and cautiously followed him, and said:

"This is going to be a good fight after we get warmed up. A bigger fight than the other."

Carcajou sidled a step closer and explained:

"I am in a hurry. I have other business."

And he shot out his long leg and caught

the toe of his moccasin on the breed's heel and all but upset him.

"This is boy's play. Let us hug each other and fight like men," urged Dubeau.

"Show your strength, cat!" howled Black the renegade. "Give Dubeau a fight. We want a fight; not tricks, trap robber."

La Blanche burst forth in a Saulteur war song of a man charging the enemy, beating his palms on his knees for a drum as he chanted—

" 'My friends do not flee; I am strong-hearted.' "

A dozen lusty voices caught it up, shouting—

"*Nidjikiweidog gego ojimokegun nin zongidee!*"

"Stand up and fight you, you cat!" yelled Black.

"I'll break an arm for that," promised Carcajou, turning his head to glare at the renegade.

Dubeau grunted in deep satisfaction and with unexpected quickness lunged forward and swung his fist downward. Carcajou instinctively tried to avoid the blow and escaped the full force. But at that the glancing impact of the big fist sent him staggering backward and brought blood on the side of his head. Dubeau saw his opportunity and made after him to catch him before he could fully recover his balance.

La Blanche groaned in dismay as he believed Carcajou was about to fall and tore open the mouth of his medicine bag its full width. But the Wolverene was only up to his tricks again. He went over until his left hand touched the ground and no farther, and at the same moment his long leg shot out and upward. Dubeau sensed his danger and essayed to stop his plunging rush, but the heel of the moccasin caught him on the jaw with a hundred and eighty pounds of bone and muscle behind it. Dubeau flew off his feet and crashed to the ground insensible.

Carcajou quickly righted himself and turned to assail John Black, but the renegade was retreating through the outer rim of the circle. The spectators were dumb for a moment, then began shouting loudly. The Picard cried:

"*Bon Dieu!* He's snapped the bear's neck!"

"I hope not!" cried Carcajou, running to his fallen opponent and kneeling beside him. He rolled the insensible figure over and dug his fingers into the base of the neck and worked the head back and forth. Some one brought water, and some one brought brandy. In a few minutes Dubeau rolled over on his side and managed to sit up.

He stared foolishly at the wide circle of grinning faces and slowly recovered his senses. Crawling to his feet and standing unsteadily, he caressed his jaw and mumbled:

"In the fiend's name, what did you do to me? Or did some one hit me with a club?"

"Just one of my tricks, Dubeau. Come now, drink some brandy and soak your bear's head in water. If you didn't have the neck of a moose your head would be floating like a pumpkin in the middle of the Narrows," said Carcajou, hurrying into his shirt and belting on his knife and ax.

"It was the medicine bag that did it," hoarsely whispered La Blanche.

"Barbarians!" weakly muttered Chartier. "Monsieur the Wolverene, I congratulate you."

"Come back here, Carcajou," begged Dubeau. "We didn't come to grips. My head will soon stop spinning——"

"*Pardieu!* But this man must be hurried to the Niagara and blooded," cried Carcajou. "No, no, old bear. I have a talk for M'sieur Durantaye. Some other time we will play some more. Be a good fellow and get drunk and don't bother me now. Come along, Old Papa. Your company would be esteemed, M'sieur de Niagara." And, followed by these two, Carcajou hastened to the fort. He could hear Dubeau bellowing after him:

"Then at the Niagara, Wolverene. I know all your tricks now."

But Dubeau ceased to matter; Carcajou was beholding Durantaye standing in front of Du Lhut's trading post. For a moment uncertainty was in Carcajou's heart. Then he squared his shoulders, brushed back his long hair and sternly told La Blanche to keep in the background. He approached the Mackinac commandant briskly, his brown face wearing a genial smile. Durantaye stared at him sharply and greeted him:

"How is this, bush loper? Have the Ottawas taken our fort? I thought you were waiting at the point for Monsieur Perrot. Where is he?"

"M'sieur Perrot is at the point. He

sends me ahead with a talk," replied Carcajou. "He will start in a day or two. He will bring the Potawatomi and other Bay Indians. He hopes to bring along more of the Ottawas. He says m'sieur the commandant is not to wait for him as he will travel fast and overtake m'sieur before he makes the Niagara."

"I can not wait for him. Most of my Ottawas and Hurons have left their canoes on the east shore of Huron and are making their way to Teiaiagon. They will travel to the Niagara by land. If they do not find us there they will start back for Mackinac. I started a canoe today to tell him his Excellency sends orders for us to make haste. Have you finished your message?"

"That is all of M'sieur Perrot's talk, m'sieur. There is a small matter that is hardly worth m'sieur's ears, but Carcajou is careful in little things as well as great. I am speaking of some trade goods some villains stole and hid down the shore of the strait. I mean the goods old Papa La Blanche and I found shortly after m'sieur sailed for this place."

"Found stolen trade goods? Who stole them?" snapped Durantaye, his gaze growing suspicious.

"Some villains unknown."

Carcajou's hair now felt wet at the roots. But his face remained blank as he added:

"I know m'sieur should not be bothered by such trifles. As the Saulteurs happened to come in from the Sault and were angry to find no trade I knew it would be serving New France to trade. I knew they would not come again for a long time if they brought a winter hunt to the French and found no goods waiting for them. I knew m'sieur, if present, would wish them to be spared disappointment——"

"You traded!" cried Durantaye, his face revealing his growing anger. "You dare to stand before me and confess that once more you have broken the law?"

"But, m'sieur! Have kindness. Have an inch of patience," begged Carcajou. "I am no law-breaker. I have been to confession. I have mended all my broken ways. Traded? Yes. But in the name of M'sieur Perrot, whose *engagé* I am. M'sieur blamed me without knowing all the facts. Perhaps that is natural. The few peltry I received I left in the fort, marked with m'sieur's name. I could not leave them for the thieving Ottawas; and I will not keep in my own hands a single beaver until I receive a permit.

"I knew you, m'sieur, were engaged in war and would not be back for some time. Being M'sieur Perrot's man I could legally trade only in his name. Of course I understood that you, m'sieur, would approve, as M'sieur Perrot had no share of the English goods, although the rascally Ottawas had much. I am a fighter; not a trader or a talker. Old Papa La Blanche could have given the talk better. I do not wonder m'sieur should be impatient——"

"That will do," broke in Durantaye in a low, ominous voice. "Several canoe loads of goods were stolen. How many did you find?"

"Only enough to bring about four hundred beaver, if it please m'sieur."

"Only enough for four hundred beaver on a rising market and with no other trade but yours awaiting the Saulteurs!" exclaimed Durantaye.

"I suspect, m'sieur, that the thieving Ottawas hid most of the goods in their village and the few we found were some of the last stolen."

Durantaye eyed him grimly, and regretted.

"If I had known this yesterday I would have told my messenger to ask about it at the point. If you leave this place except to go with us to the Niagara I will mark you as a deserter and a traitor, even as I have marked Fontaine. Then if you ever fall into my hands again——"

He did not finish the threat. Carajouc humbly bowed and sighed:

"My heart is heavy that m'sieur should think so poorly of me. Take me to the Seneca country. I will smash down the Western Door alone. When M'sieur Perrot comes he will tell you I have told the truth. I can die, m'sieur, with a smile. I am a very brave man. But I am too simple to lie."

"Do not wander from this place," warned Durantaye, and he turned and entered the fort.

Papa La Blanche stole up beside Carcajou's side and tremulously whispered:

"I dare to breathe, my little one. But through all your talk my heart stood still. You'll soon need another trip to Quebec and another confession for all your lies."

"Silence, Old Imbecile. I said 'about' four hundred. I am no clerk to keep figures in my head. And perhaps I forgot to count some that you traded."

Then he breathed deep and in great relief sighed:

"Well, that trouble is kicked behind us. I am swimming in sweat. Now I feel like playing."

"Trouble behind you! What will happen after Perrot comes and says there is more than a thousand beaver traded on his account?"

"*Bon Dieu!* Am I a wise man to know everything? Can't you stop croaking and say something? The *coureurs de bois* have some brandy. I need a keg. I believe I will fight again with that bear of a Dubeau."

THEY found the drink and a riotous company; but Dubeau had changed his mind about fighting. His head still felt as if it were split apart from chin to crown. Carcajou soon observed that Chartier had followed him, strutting proudly and staring insolently at the woods runners, his hand on his hip. Curious, and some vicious glances were cast at him; but Carcajou, speaking in the Ottawa tongue, gave warning that the young man carried his road belts, and evil to the man who troubled him.

Unsuspecting that he was under the bush loper's protection, Chartier gradually abated his haughty bearing and partook of the brandy. Warmed out of his veneer of hauteur, he acquiesced to Carcajou's requests and sang several love songs. Passionate in their loves and hates, the woods runners quickly reacted to the pathos and sentiment of the singing, and several were reduced to tears. Dead Bear, the Seneca, hovered along the edge of the camp as if keeping watch over his rescuer, but Brouwer remained in the fort. Turcot was staying in the camp, but kept much to himself and did not venture near Carcajou.

Carcajou told his friends that Perrot would be along inside of another two days, yet several days passed without his appearing. Durantaye's messenger came back and reported Perrot as still believing he could induce the Ottawas to help carry the club against the Five Nations.

When the *coureurs de bois* had exhausted their liquor they took to grumbling, and threatened to proceed alone to Niagara. And each day found it more difficult to hold those Indians from returning home who had not taken the long portage to Teiaiagon.

Tonty urged an immediate departure for the Niagara, sensibly insisting that the Indians could not be held to the expedition unless they were faced with action. Then came a messenger from Perrot saying he would wait only one more day. He briefly confirmed by this man Carcajou's story of the Saulteur trade, and he mentioned a thousand instead of four hundred beaver. Carcajou was promptly called before the commandant and questioned on this point. He readily explained:

"We had to work fast for fear the Ottawas would come and make mischief. Old Papa La Blanche helped me with the trade. We had been drinking, although I was sober enough. But that English rum filled Papa's head with a heavy fog. He forgot to tell me all the packs he traded for, the old rascal! That is the curse of old men drinking English rum. And m'sieur says a thousand beaver! *Ma foi!* But that is good! For once my enemies can not say I talk too big."

"What shall we do with a man like this, chevalier?" Durantaye asked of Tonty.

"Put him in the front line when we strike the Iroquois," was the prompt reply.

"With the Wolverene prowling ahead of the army the Iroquois will not surprize us," promised Carcajou.

Durantaye summoned his officers and announced that the army would start at once for the Niagara. Excitement and good feeling replaced sullenness in the camps of the *coureurs de bois* and the soldiers. Those red allies who had not gone across country to Teiaiagon were thrown out in advance of the fleet with a dozen canoes of soldiers to discourage any sudden whim to desert or mutiny. In anticipation of an immediate departure the canoes had been pitched and the supplies kept intact.

Carcajou and La Blanche paddled in the van of the *coureurs de bois*. Brouwer and Chartier were with the officers. Dead Bear the Seneca ranged abreast of Durantaye's canoe, where he could keep his eye on the young Frenchmen. The story of his rescue, thanks to Carcajou, was now known throughout the army. The *coureurs de bois*, having learned of his brave act of leaping into the sea, greatly embellished by the bush loper, viewed the slim figure in its tattered finery with much respect. Carcajou's recital left the impression that Chartier, after saving the galley slave, had kept the captain and crew from turning back to Marseilles by his rapier alone.

The head of the fleet was clear of the Narrows and entering the Erie before the rest of the canoes were well under way. Durantaye's canoe was clear of the passage between Grosse and Turkey Island when great excitement was caused by the sight of a canoe paddling swiftly from the south. The man with the steering paddle fired a gun. The canoe came on as if the three occupants were fleeing for their lives.

"What evil has the foul fiend thrown across our path now?" muttered Durantaye.

"It is either very good or very bad news," said Tonty.

"The Indians may have surprized our soldiers and massacred them," suggested Du Lhut.

Word passed back through the long line of canoes that something had happened. Treachery of their savage allies instantly leaped into the mind of more than one *coureur de bois*. As this possibility was considered the prisoners overheard enough to understand the fear and did not know whether to rejoice or be afraid.

Dead Bear shot clear of the flotilla and raced down to meet and pass the returning canoe as if desirous of learning the truth from his own eyes. Fontaine called out to Carcajou—

"Have the savages killed the soldiers?"

And although he believed he was condemned to death he hoped this was not the case.

"Nothing like that," loudly answered Carcajou. "Probably a talk from the Iroquois saying they have turned against the English and want peace. They've heard I am coming, the rascals!"

Cheers and good-natured derision greeted this suggestion. The *coureurs de bois*, carefree and reckless, and hungry for a fight, cared little what had happened. One of them started a Sioux scalp song, and the narrow passage reechoed with their grim chanting as the approaching canoe swirled up alongside that of Durantaye's. There was a brief exchange of words, and Durantaye shouted something to the canoes behind him. A tremendous outburst of cheers and yells greeted his words, and as his announcement was repeated, each section of the flotilla screamed:

"More prisoners! Thirty more prisoners! We've captured MacGregorie and his men! Twenty more canoes of goods and rum!"

The fair meadows and background of noble forest resounded again and again with triumphant cries of *coureurs de bois* and soldiers. Durantaye's face was lighted with joy as he realized how thoroughly he had thwarted Governor Dongan's bold scheme to capture the Indian trade on the Upper Lakes.

But as the leader indulged in second thought his expression became less joyous. He glanced at Tonty, who quickly said:

"We must return to the post, monsieur, and talk this over."

Durantaye gave orders for ten canoes of *coureurs de bois* to advance and help bring in the prisoners while the rest of his force turned back to the post and placed the Rooseboom party under heavy guard. Carcajou was among the first to start to meet the MacGregorie party, but was harshly commanded by Durantaye:

"Turn back. We prefer to keep you close to us."

The canoes faced to the north and made rapidly to the post. The prisoners were returned to their former camp and strongly surrounded. Durantaye then held a council with his officers, saying:

"Sixty prisoners are too many for us to take down to the Niagara. The Iroquois know we are coming. They will try to ambush us there. We are not sure of our Indians until we can get them into the fighting. If they turn against us and release the prisoners it would be very bad."

Du Lhut promptly advised:

"The one thing we're concerned with is to whip the Iroquois. We mustn't weaken out chances by guarding prisoners. Why bother with them? Why not leave them here at the post? After we've whipped the Iroquois we can take them to Montreal."

"If they don't escape while we're on the Niagara," mused Tonty, thoughtfully rubbing his metal hand against his chin.

"But even that is better than for us to disappoint Monseigneur the governor by being slow in making the Niagara. Yes; sixty are too many to be bothered with. If Perrot and his savages were here it would be easier."

"If he were with us I would start with them all for the Niagara," said Durantaye.

"This post is too near the Niagara to serve as a prison. And there's the Rat. Until I know which way he'll jump we can't leave them here. That leaves but one course: Take them all back to Mackinac and leave them heavily guarded. We will start with them for the point in the morning, if you, messieurs, agree."

Tonty and Du Lhut did agree, and the former added:

"No rum should be given our savages tonight. At least, only a little."

"They will want the rum, but if they have it they will do evil. We'll have to watch them as well as the prisoners. And they'll be too sick to travel tomorrow," said Durantaye. "But we can give them plenty of gifts and promise them brandy after we've whipped the Iroquois."

With the situation thus adjusted the three set about selecting a camp for the new prisoners. Rooseboom's and MacGregorie's bands were not to be allowed any intercourse. A spot was chosen some distance from that occupied by Rooseboom's men and with the post between. Men were selected to guard the new camp. By the time all these arrangements were made the firing of guns announced the coming of the prisoners, and a rush was made to the shore.

Colonel Patrick MacGregorie, a favorite of Dongan, was in the first canoe, very dour of expression. There had been a fight, for the Scotchman was not lacking in courage and was loath to lose goods worth nine thousand beaver. But with the odds hopelessly against him he had surrendered to save loss of life.

Continuous cheering greeted the twenty loaded canoes as they were lined up along the shore. Durantaye talked apart with MacGregorie for a few moments, then gave his orders, and the prisoners were conducted to their camp and warned that any attempt to escape would be met with instant death. The goods were not unloaded, as it was proposed to take them along with the prisoners to Mackinac.

After routine had been established some of the rum was opened to satisfy the clamorous demands of the *coureurs de bois*, but only a little was distributed among the prisoners. While Carcajou approved of jollifications he was glad the Indians were to be denied their debauch; and he drank sparingly himself. When it grew dark and the *coureurs de bois* were making the night hideous with their howling and dancing and singing and fighting he disappeared long enough to appropriate two canoes containing the worth of a thousand beaver, and to hide the same some distance north of the post.

"They will break our heads with head-breakers!" groaned Papa La Blanche after he had been taken into the Wolverene's confidence. "You're very drunk, or you would never dream of trying to trade for Perrot again with stolen goods. That story of finding them won't go down again."

"You are very old and talk like a child, Papa Simple," jeered Carcajou. "No one can look me in the eye and prove I stole the goods. There will be much running about and much confusion in the morning. There are many *coureurs de bois* here as well as the Indians. Who knows but what John Black or any one of a hundred woods runners took them? The commandant will be careful not to lose his woods runners by charging them with theft.

"As to trading for M'sieur Perrot, I've done that once. I kept my word about covering my own dead; and he takes a fat profit. But what about little Carcajou when he comes back from the Iroquois fight?

"Our royal papa, Old Louis, won't think to outfit me with goods. Can't you see, imbecile, that I must have something to trade for myself? I shall not forget you, Old Weakness. You shall have some red cloth and *rassade* to trade for wives."

"There is evil around us," muttered La Blanche. "I dreamed of a black ax in the moon last night. That means some one I know very well is about to die."

Carcajou crossed himself and philosophically decided:

"If Death is near keeping away from the rum won't keep the old man away. Come. Some rum and a song."

He ran to where the *coureurs de bois* were feasting and drinking, leaped into the center of the big circle, smote Dubeau mightily on the shoulder, snatched his dish of rum and drank most of it. Dubeau, who was half drunk, seized his arm in an iron grip and led him aside.

"Not now, big bear. You're too drunk. At least wait till I catch up with you."

"Eat your tongue," rumbled Dubeau. "My mother was a Huron. The Huron men will talk to me. A Huron man told me something tonight in trade for a drink out of my dish. They are smoking war tobacco again. They plan to kill the French tonight. They say the French will all be drunk. They plan to let loose the prisoners and kill all the French."

"You have told M'sieur Durantaye?" sharply queried Carcajou.

Dubeau shrugged his broad shoulders and thickly reminded the Wolverene:

"I am only half French. The Huron half fills me to my toes tonight. But I will not turn against the French."

He returned to the drinking, apparently no longer concerned by this new danger to the French.

CARCAJOU ran swiftly to the fort, where the officers were drinking, and demanded admission. Durantaye, hearing him talking to the sentinel, called out for him to be admitted. He hurriedly gave warning. Durantaye lost no time in questioning him. He gave orders for the soldiers to stand under arms and to double the guard around the two bands of prisoners. To Carcajou he directed:

"Get together all the *coureurs de bois* who can stand and surround the Hurons, but neither say nor do anything."

On returning to his boisterous friends Carcajou had Du Lhut's company as far as the first camp of soldiers. He halted when he observed several men trying to arouse two of their mates. Du Lhut angrily demanded:

"Drunk so early? Douse them in the river."

"But, m'sieur, we are afraid. They drank only once. We can't wake them up. They drank a long time ago when the rum was first passed. They've slept ever since. We're afraid," said a soldier.

Carcajou dropped on his knees and after a brief examination told Du Lhut—

"These two men are dead, m'sieur."

And he remembered Papa La Blanche's dream of a black ax in the moon and crossed himself.

"Impossible!" sharply said Du Lhut; and he proceeded to make an examination. Soon he was erect and muttering, "*Pardieu!* But they are dead! How could a drink of rum kill them? You other men are alive. You've drunk more than these two dead men. You all drank the same rum?"

"We brought ours from a keg at the landing when the guard began giving it out," replied a soldier. "We found them here with their gourds filled. We didn't understand how they could get drink ahead of us when we were helped from the first keg. We said that, and they laughed at us. Then they seemed to be asleep. We let them alone. We let their rum alone, being honest comrades."

And he pointed to two gourds, half filled with liquor, and propped against a log.

Carcajou picked up a gourd, smelled of it and then took a mouthful. He retained it for a moment and then spat it out and with a grimace, exclaimed—

"This drink doesn't taste honest, m'sieur!"

He tried the other gourd and repeated his show of disgust. Then he sampled one of the other gourds and assured them:

"That is honest, These two men have been poisoned, m'sieur."

"That can't be," protested Du Lhut. "That would mean the English brought poisoned rum to trade to the Indians. They never did that. They came to trade."

"Much rum was loose for the taking up at the point," Carcajou reminded him. "But let some one bring Old Papa La Blanche. He follows me like my shadow. He will be near."

"He is here," croaked La Blanche, advancing into the firelight. "His old ears have heard."

He picked up one of the suspected gourds and smelled and tasted of it, made a face and declared:

"It is the May-apple.* They grow here at the Narrows. The fruits when preserved are good eating, but the roots are poison. Some one has steeped the roots of the May apple and put it in some of the rum. I saw a Saulteur man die of it. There's bad business going on here. But I never knew the poison to work so fast. I would say these dead men got the poisoned rum at the point and brought some with them. That would give it time to kill. Last night, m'sieur, I dreamed of a black ax in the moon."

"Keep that dream to yourself, old man," commanded Du Lhut. "And all of you understand this: The savages must think they died from overdrinking. Let them be buried in the morning."

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*Also called mandrake. *Podophyllum peltatum.*

"If m'sieur would be so kind as to hear a poor *coureur de bois,*" said Carcajou meekly.

"Speak out. What is it?"

"Although these poor men are dead yet they can serve France. They can help us stop much drinking in the savages' camps and make them afraid of the English. Let these two be carried to the Hurons and I will make a talk that will drive evil thoughts out of their heads."

"Those Hurons!" growled Du Lhut. "I wish all of them and all the Ottawas had gone overland to Teiaiagon. You wait here while I learn what Monsieur Durantaye thinks about it."

He made off rapidly for the fort and soon returned, accompanied by Durantaye and Tonty.

The dead men were examined again, and Tonty touched his tongue to the rum.

"They surely have been poisoned even as this old man has said," he announced. "The drinking must be stopped at once or we'll find only dead men in the morning."

Du Lhut believed with La Blanche that the poisoned rum had been brought from the point and that none of MacGregorie's rum could be contaminated. Nevertheless word was rapidly circulated among the soldiers and *coureurs de bois* that there was danger in drinking. The soldiers put the rum aside, but the woods-runners declared that they were already dead men if the liquor were poisoned and continued their carousal.

After this precaution had been taken Carcajou was permitted to carry out his scheme. Escorted by two files of soldiers, the dead men were carried inside the fires of the Huron camp.

These warriors were not yet so deeply under the influence of liquor, thanks to the smallness of their rations, as to be incapable of realizing that something very bad had happened. Carcajou came to a halt in the middle of the circle and, pointing to the dead men, loudly announced:

"The rum of the English, who are fathers of the Iroquois, killed these men. It is some of the same rum the English brought to give to you. Much of it is filled with the juice of deadly roots. Do not drink any more or you will become ghosts.

"Your French fathers come to save you. The English would kill you. They are bad flesh. The Iroquois are their children. They send men out here with bad drink to stop you from going against the Iroquois."

This accusation, supported by the deadly evidence, caused great fear. Several of the Hurons were seized with terrible nausea and declared that the English had poisoned them. Hatred against the English flared up like a handful of loose gunpowder thrown on a fire; and instead of wishing to release the prisoners and helping them overcome the French the Indians now wished to massacre them. Only the strong guard around the prison camps thwarted this deadly purpose.

The morning found the red allies in a sullen mood. So uncertain was their temper, and so many were the prisoners, that it became more imperative than ever to take the prisoners to Mackinac before proceeding to the Niagara. Durantaye was in a furious humor as he realized that the delay might upset all of Governor Denonville's plans and cause a repetition of La Barre's misfire.

"If we fail against the Iroquois this time we might as well abandon all these Western posts," Durantaye told his captains. "For we'd have the Lake tribes on our backs before snow flies. Yet we must go to the point even if it means the savages will remain there. Our only hope is to reach the Niagara before the savages from Teiaiagon make the portage. If they get there first they'll start for home at once and it will be years, if ever, before they will go with us again on a warpath. Make everything ready for an instant departure."

The army and the prisoners were hurriedly fed and hustled into the canoes. The *coureurs de bois* were selected to guard the English canoes. Just as the return voyage was to be commenced a loud cry was raised by the Picard, who was scouting up the Narrows. And his canoe turned and came racing back to the landing. When his words could be understood he was shouting:

"Perrot's coming! Perrot's coming with his few Frenchmen and many Indians!"

In another few minutes there was no doubt about this good news. The Narrows appeared to be carpeted with canoes, and white men were in the lead.

Durantaye loudly shouted:

"Turn about! Paddle south! We're going through to the Niagara!"

And once more the French and the red horde were on the way to break the Western Door of the Long House and to regain for France the prestige La Barre had lost.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR FRANCE AND BEAVER

WITH very little delay the Erie was traversed as far as Long Point. A portion of the prisoners were compelled to work while the others were kept securely bound; for the danger of their turning upon their captors would not be ended until the Niagara was reached.

In all the motley gathering there were two who were cast down by this journeying to the East. These were La Fontaine and Dead Bear the Seneca. The Frenchman felt the chill shadow of death and was moodily silent. The escaped galley slave seldom spoke unless spoken to. He had no talk with the Indians whatever that the white men could observe. None of the savages attempted to address him, although his history was well known by the red horde, and he was viewed with awe and respect. Among the tribes from La Baye he was not welcome, but none dared to intimate as much except by silence when he wandered near a kettle. This distaste arose not from his being one of the hated Iroquois but because an Illinois man happened to say he acted like a ghost. After this remark had run through the red camps Dead Bear was considered to be something supernormal, if not supernatural.

He spoke French well but talked with the officers only when questioned. For most of the time he kept close to young Chartier, as if to watch over him, and spoke only when asked some question.

Once when Chartier's canoe was alongside that of Durantaye's he reminded the commander with eloquent homesickness of the delights to be found in the cook-shops in the street de la Hutchette. As if speaking his thoughts aloud Dead Bear spoke up, saying—

"A galley slave does not see those."

Father Enjalrane kept much of the time with the Indians and was always exhorting them to prove themselves to be brave men and ever telling them that the Iroquois were pagans and could not stand against Christian tribes. Perrot kept with his Potawatomis, Illinois and other tribesmen, and left them only when Durantaye sent for him to paddle in his company and discuss the coming campaign.

On landing at Long Point the canoes were drawn from the water, overhauled and pitched, and kettles of fresh meat were set to cooking. Chartier and his shadow, the Seneca, repaired to the camp of the *coureurs de bois* and invited themselves to the feast. Chartier explained his forwardness by complaining:

"Some of the barbarians put several pounds of candles into our kettle of *sagamity*, and that spoiled the dish for me."

Carcajou, in behalf of the roisterous brotherhood, made the two welcome and then asked Dead Bear—

"What does it mean to dream of many elks, Tsonnontouan*?"

"To dream of elks is a sign of life," mumbled the Seneca.

"Of course. And a wolverene would be foolish to dream of anything else. *Mes amis*, your Carcajou has dreamed of elks."

This announcement was greeted with loud cheers, some ironically sounded, some in all sincerity; for many a woods runner had grafted onto his racial superstitions certain beliefs of the red man.

The Seneca lifted his head long enough to sweep his brooding gaze over the rough company and tersely remarked—

"I see men here who have dreamed of bears."

"That's a bad talk, Tsonnontouan," sharply corrected Carcajou.

The Seneca made no answer. Dubeau's Huron blood was quick to respond to the warning, and he grumbled:

"The man makes me feel queer. I hope I shall not dream of bears."

While the meat was being dished out on platters of bark Brouwer sauntered up and respectfully saluted Carcajou. The bush loper politely returned his greeting and asked him to eat. Brouwer refused but paused and talked aimiably for a minute. After he had passed on, Papa La Blanche, who was still lamenting his interrupted nuptials with the lonely Ottawa woman back of St. Ignace, maliciously whispered:

"This time you did not show your teeth to that man, my Wolverene. Are you afraid?"

"None of that, Old Nonsense, or you'll

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*Seneca.

feel my claws. He goes to fight the Iroquois. I will not dig up an ax against any man who fights for New France. I am pleasant even to Turcot, the assassin; and to John Black, who is worse than Turcot, because he has more in his head."

Long Point had been reached late in the afternoon, and Durantaye announced that the start for the Niagara would be made in the morning. Perrot found Carcajou at the camp of the *coureurs de bois* and took him aside to suggest:

"It might be well for you to reconnoiter ahead of the army and see what you find at the portage, my friend."

Carcajou, ever ready for adventure, surprized him by replying:

"M'sieur shall command; but there is my promise made to the Ottawas and Hurons at St. Ignace. If I go ahead of the army I can not keep that promise."

Perrot was puzzled, and the bush loper explained:

"I believe I said much the same to you, m'sieur. I must prove I am cunning as a wolverene and am worthy of my name. I must discover who kills our Frenchmen with poisoned rum; who kills our savages with French axes. And there is the dead Tionontati man killed at the Narrows. And I remember now a bullet nearly hit me when we killed a bear on Bald Point. M'sieur said I was not cunning to leave that mystery behind me. I told the Ottawas at St. Ignace I would learn the truth before we made the Niagara portage. Here, on this point, is my last chance to keep my word."

"You will learn nothing here," discouraged Perrot. "The time to discover the assassin at the Narrows was when you were at the Narrows. The time to find the slayer of the Ottawa men was when you were at St. Ignace. It is the poisoned rum that worries me. The Ottawas and Hurons suspect that one of my Potawatomis did that. Either some one has told them lies, or they are remembering the Potawatomis make much root-medicine."

"Some one has talked," promptly decided Carcajou. "If I can find that man I will be close to the killer. The Potawatomis make good medicine and make the most of it from ginseng that hurts no one. So, m'sieur, if I have my way I shall stay here tonight."

"Very well. But you'll learn nothing. The trail is too old. The scent is dead even for a wolverene. And while we are talking, my friend, there is this: When I thanked Monsieur Durantaye for the trade goods he seemed to be displeased and told me, 'Thank the Wolverene.' That was odd. I fear something has been hidden from me."

"Some men claim all the credit. A few are big enough to give it all away," aimiably remarked Carcajou. "Yet it was the Wolverene who made the trade. Our leader was surprized that I made such a good trade. *Ma foi!* How I worked!"

"Monsieur Du Lhut's bearing was strained," added Perrot; and he eyed the bush loper sharply.

"In confidence, m'sieur, I fear M'sieur Du Lhut is jealous of other traders, and regrets giving away so many goods to the Ottawas and Hurons."

But Perrot retained his suspicions and insisted:

"There is something queer about those goods you traded. Monsieur Durantaye makes me feel that nothing will be said about it as we have bloody work ahead of us. But you must bear yourself well unless you wish to hear from it after we've whipped the Iroquois."

"Put me ahead of the best fighting men," stoutly said Carcajou. "I will show you how I will make those pagan rascals take to the bush. I have dreamed of many elks."

Then his braggadocio vanished, and he was lamenting:

"But that poor Fontaine! He surely has dreamed of bears. What will they do with the prisoners, m'sieur?"

"Watch your tongue when you speak of a deserter," sternly warned Perrot. Then more amiably, "The prisoners will be sent on to Montreal to be dealt with later."

He turned back to where the officers were messing and cursing the kettle of *sagamity*, which some Indian had spoiled for them by adding tallow.

THE Wolverene rejoined his friends. Brouwer was seated behind Dead Bear and smoking his pipe in silence. Chartier was in high spirits at the prospect of returning to Quebec after the business in the Long House had been settled. By this time he was a prime favorite with the woods runners. They had learned he had courage, the first requisite for endorsement; and they loved his sentimental songs.

Papa La Blanche was sad this night.

His mind was divided in recalling the many years of savage freedom among the far tribes and in remembering disconnected phases of his youth on the St. Lawrence. Only his life with the Indians seemed real; the rest was a dream. Beyond the St. Lawrence his boyhood was even more unreal, and yet he sighed dismally when Chartier spoke of old Anjou. His melancholy fled, however, and his companions cheered loudly, when Carcajou produced a keg of rum.

Night had shrouded the point, and the fires flared against a background of velvet darkness. None could say when the bush loper brought the keg into the camp or whence he procured it. With something that smacked of legerdemain he presented it.

"You can steal horns off the devil!" admiringly cried the Picard.

"I have loved you for your fighting; now I must love you for this," grunted Dubeau.

Chartier offered part of his ration to Dead Bear as a matter of courtesy and heard the usual refusal:

"It makes me think of the *comite.* It makes my back hurt. The *comite* always smelled of brandy."

For two hours the keg was enjoyed by Carcajou's circle and was then hurled empty into the water. The rest of the camp was already in blankets and the sentinels were at their posts. This watchfulness resulted from custom rather than from any fear of surprize. The woods runners turned in. Carcajou took his blankets and walked outside the firelight. La Blanche followed him and complained that it was foolish to sleep away from a fire.

Carcajou softly told him—

"No sleep for us this night, Papa Simple."

"Even the fear of purgatory can not make me help you steal anything tonight," passionately announced La Blanche. "*Mon Dieu!* What do you think? Do you expect to keep on stealing all your life and not be hung up in a cage to dry? Would you steal all of New France? Do you want to be killed as thief?"

"Harsh words. Very harsh," muttered Carcajou. "We will keep awake to stop some one else from stealing. Smoke that with your war tobacco, my boy."

"But there is nothing to steal, you big ox!"

"Some one might try to steal a life, my boy. There is the black ax in the moon you dreamed of," whispered Carcajou.

"The holy Saints help us!" croaked the old man.

All the superstitions absorbed during his long life among the tribes impelled him to believe implicitly in dream omens. Like his red companions, he denied that there was any such thing as chance. Everything that happened was an omen. Dreams were superlative omens.

He had endeavored to convince himself that the prophecy of the ax dream was fulfilled by the soldiers poisoned at the Narrows. But dreams had to do with the dreamer; else they would have small value. A black ax in the moon indicated violent death would come to him in the night. Carcajou's sinister suggestion that it would be this night that Death stalked the camp left him very melancholy. He had planned to live indefinitely. Carcajou sensed his fear, and encouraged him:

"Never mind the black ax, my boy. Since you dreamed that I have dreamed of many elks. An elk dream is stronger than an evil dream. One elk would be enough to cover me. But there were many elks; enough to protect my friends who keep near me. And surely I saw one very old elk that meant you, Old Papa. That is, if you do as I say."

"I will leave my medicine bag wide open," mumbled La Blanche. "But there was a feast I promised it. I should have made it at St. Ignace. Tell me what to do. I feel young. I ought to live for many years."

"You will live forever," declared Carcajou. "I believe you were alive when the Italian discovered this country. This is what we will do. We are away from the light of the fires and we will spread our blankets."

"You said there was no sleep for us this night," La Blanche reminded him.

"And we will wrap our blankets around some pieces of deadwood, and then we will creep to one side and wait to see if any one brings the black ax you saw in the moon. Just remember I am an elk-dreamer, my boy, and you'll be all right for the next two hundred years."

La Blanche was eager to agree to anything. It required but a minute of groping about in the thin growth to find enough deadwood to round out the blankets in the semblance of human forms. This task finished, they crept to one side with the blankets between them and the dying fires.

La Blanche had no idea what they were waiting for, except it was Death. He assumed it would come in some supernatural guise, and he clamped his jaws tightly to prevent his teeth from clicking. After an hour of waiting he brought his nerves under control by forcing his thoughts to wander back to the hazy past. In a tremulous whisper he told his companion:

"On this day ripe strawberries can be eaten in Quebec. I would have liked to be there when the apple blossoms were in flower. Apple blossoms always make me think of Old Pierre's granddaughter. But that was ages ago and back in Anjou. She's an old woman now, or dead."

"She is always young."

"Soon the corn will begin to shoot into ears," continued the old man softly. "I remember when they first made hay on the St. Lawrence. Two men with guns to guard every worker. The Iroquois crept very close."

"In Montreal the pears and melons are a week ahead of Quebec," murmured Carcajou. "But those in Quebec are much better."

"The cherry and plum trees were in flower late last month. And tomorrow they will take strawberries to market."

"All the women, *noblesse* and common, wearing caps. Strawberries and cherries are good; but for me melons and ripe pears. See here, my son. No more of this or our ears will go to sleep," said Carcajou.

But now that his mind was working up the channel to the past the old man persisted in dwelling on his youth even if forbidden to voice his thoughts. It was Carcajou who heard a sound, so soft a woods mouse might have made it. He pressed a hand on his companion's knee, and both came to acute attention. If any one approached their position from down the point he would be vaguely outlined against the glowing coals of the camp-fires.

The sound reaching Carcajou's sensitive ears was so faint that he could not locate the direction. It came again, barely audible, and La Blanche, now wide awake to danger, seized the bush loper's hand and pointed it to the right. They were facing the camp.

TO BE CONTINUED

Fowl Tactics

by Douglas Oliver

Author of "Tub Tobin Repeats," "Queer Fish," etc.

"CHRISTMAS weather, all right," said the Old Man, pulling back the curtains that we might note the *spit-spit-spit-spit* of snowflakes against the windowpane. "Christmas weather," he reiterated dolefully, "but who the dickens is going to put the X in X-mas? That's what's worrying me."

Canning, one of the company commanders assembled at the Old Man's bidding, whipped a cigaret from his face to inquire:

"X stands for "merry", sir?"

The Old Man leaned back in his chair, observing:

"Right you are, Canning. And 'merry', I regret to say, has been knocked galley west. Tell them, Lewis."

I, being Lewis, told them of the little bombshell that had been dropped into battalion headquarters earlier in the day.

"There have been," I explained, "certain last-minute alterations to Division's plan to supply all troops with Christmas fowl. Now, certain units must consider themselves also rans——"

"That's enough!" Canning had flicked his cigaret stub the length of the room and had blatted interruption. "That's plenty," he went on. Any one with half an eye can see where we finish."

Young Meyers cast an imploring look my way.

"Don't we even show?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not," I told them. "We have Division's regrets——"

"And a —— fine dinner regrets will make," scoffed Blane. "The men will go wild over regrets."

For a few moments silence hung like a wet blanket over the Old Man's quarters. The Old Man now stood looking out of the window on to the château yard where some men were snow-balling. Cheery cries came to our ears. Canning only glowered the more. Meyers plucked nervously at his snip of a mustache. Blane's fingers beat a tattoo on the table top.

"We've got to do something," Canning finally declared.

"Simply got to," said Meyers.

"I'll say we've got to," added Blane.

I shot a look at "Sleepy" Caldwell, seated by the door. Up to the moment he, our fourth company commander, had not been heard from. But even as I looked Sleepy rid himself of a grunt, a snort, a chuckle and a laugh in quick succession. I knew the signs; Sleepy had some corking idea.

"You're not figgering on Sandy Claus, eh?" said Sleepy with a wide grin. "No? Well, I am. When I was a little shaver I always worried round Christmas time 'bout empty stockings, but I never once found them empty. Trust Sandy Claus, I say. He'll look out for us."

The Old Man wheeled from the window. By the look on his face I realized he had his dander up. Sleepy certainly had picked an inopportune moment to express himself as he had done.

"Glad to see," chewed the Old Man, "that you've at least come out of coma, Caldwell, idiotic though your remarks seem to be. You, I take it, are but little interested in this situation with which we find ourselves confronted."

"You misjudge me, sir," Sleepy voiced mild protest, and started to get up. But the Old Man motioned for silence, and Sleepy slumped back in his seat. The Old Man went on:

"The problem we face, gentlemen, is that of providing some satisfactory substitute for the turkey which, to speak flippantly, has flown our coop. I need not impress upon you the fact that this Christmas is the first the unit has spent out of the line since coming to France. The men are all keyed up. They've done nothing but talk fowl dinner since Division—hang their blundering ways—broached the idea. It's up to us, gentlemen. Division has disappointed us. True! But we must not disappoint the troops. Now, who'll provide this substitute, this substitute that will put the X in Xmas?"

"Leave it to me," shot Canning.

"Or me," said Meyers.

"Or me," added Blane.

The Old Man rubbed his hands together in approving fashion.

"Proper spirit, gentlemen," he said. "And you, Caldwell?"

Sleepy drawled—

"I can at least try, sir."

"About what I expected from you, Caldwell," declared the Old Man, banging down at the table, where he drew a sheet of paper to him and began to scribble in his jerky way. We watched him write, aware that something was in the wind.

Presently he glanced up, asking—

"No trouble to jockey a Paris leave, Lewis?"

"No, sir!" I promptly replied.

"Well, then," asserted the Old Man, "just to indicate the deep concern with which I view this situation I propose offering a Paris warrant—five days' leave—to the one of you who pulls the fat from the fire, so to speak; to the one of you who makes the 25th what it should be. And to convince you I'm not bluffing, gentlemen, I've placed my proposition in writing—here. Lewis can be judge; can take charge of things. I'm sorry I'll be away for a day or so. But I know that when I return I shall find—I'm confident of finding—the situation cleared up."

We clicked heels and saluted smartly as the Old Man left the room. I heard the clang of the big door at the back of the château whither he had gone. Then I stepped over to the cupboard, where I procured a bottle and glasses.

Mimicking the Old Man's manner of delivery, I said:

"Gentlemen! To start you off right! On your mark! Get set! Go!"

The glasses jingled as the boys set them down on the table top.

"I hereby declare this race on," I stated. "And may the best man win. From now on you must think only of fowl tactics."

Canning and Meyers and Blane seemed keen for the Old Man's stunt, but Sleepy Caldwell continued to evince the same disinterest on which he'd been checked up by the C. O. Once Sleepy drawled:

"Can't we avoid the running about this business will entail? This is a rest tour we're supposed to be doing 'way back here. I can't say I'm strong for work. Couldn't we appropriate some of the regimental funds and go buy from the villagers what chickens we would need?"

"Not a bad idea," I commented, "except that there are no chickens to buy. The Montreal outfit that went out of this town as we came in put the *caput* sign on the chickens. They stole, I'm led to believe, everything old enough to say: 'Peep-peep!' With the result that any one poking around a hen coop these nights is liable to run into the business end of a shotgun. Experience teaches. The Frenchies have quit yelling, '*Voller*' and are shooting now instead of challenging."

"You can't kid me," scoffed Canning.

"Nor me," said Meyers.

"Nor me," added Blane.

I looked at Sleepy Caldwell. Sleepy had his square heels planted on the polished table top.

"What do you think, Sleepy?" I fired his way.

"I think," said Sleepy slowly, "it's about time for another drink."

WE DID the on-the-mark, get-set and go business over again. We repeated the maneuver until Sleepy looked as if he had taken more than was good for him.

Suddenly from the back of the château sounded a door's clanging. The Old Man was returning. Somehow or other I got the bunch together, out of the room, up the hall, through the main entrance and on to the drive at the foot of the château steps. Sleepy, I felt, was in deep enough. It would never do to allow him, in his present woozy shape, to cross the Old Man's path. So I hustled him ahead of the others.

"Why speedsh? Why all speedsh?" he kept gasping in my ear.

"Somebody run him up and down," I pleaded to the other three. "Sober him up."

Blane sniffed and said—

"Can't be bothered."

"Somebody else, not me," hummed young Meyers.

Canning stuck his nose higher.

"Throw him in the pond there," he suggested. "Cold water's the only treatment for him."

Sleepy had his eyes on the château pond.

"Don' wanna swimsh," he protested thickly. "Can't swimsh for one thingsh; too deepsh, nozzer. An' no swimsh in Chrishmash weasher! Brrrrh! More like skatesh."

Canning snapped—

"And a —— of a lot of ice you'll cut in this proposition the Old Man's put up to us."

Sleepy grinned.

"You shink sho?" he asked.

"I know so," flared Canning. "And I tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you a thousand francs to—yes, to two hundred, that you won't be the winner."

To my amazement Sleepy mumbled—

"I'll just takesh 'at if Loo here'll hold moneysh."

I cut in.

"Sleepy's too slopped up," I said, "to realize that he's in bad with the Old Man already."

"Let him suit himself," snapped Canning. "I'm giving him big enough odds."

He turned and winked at Meyers, saying—

"Like taking candy from a baby."

"And I'll jush shoot myshelf," grinned Sleepy, reaching awkwardly for his wallet.

At this instant there came a lot of squawking from the center of the pond.

"Who'sh blowin' whishels?" demanded Sleepy.

No reply! We were too busy looking at the mud-bank of an island which poked out of the water, a good forty feet from shore. On this island we saw a sort of wire enclosure banked high with weed growth. But what interested us most—it was that way with me at least—were the innumerable long-necked birds we saw huddled within the enclosure.

"Ducks," Canning, Meyers and Blane breathed in unison.

I couldn't help noticing the interested flash in their eyes. I turned to Sleepy Caldwell.

Sleepy was still talking to himself, asking—

"Who'sh blowin' whishels?"

I started to explain the situation to him; to tell him of the ducks. But Canning rather angrily checked me up.

"Being a judge," he said, "doesn't compel you to tell everything you know, you know."

FALPART'S one redeeming characteristic lay in its remoteness from the line. In that respect men had much for which to be thankful. However, it did not prevent them from grousing; and I heard plenty of it as I made my rounds of the billets, old barns of places through whose chinky roofs melted snow everlastingly dripped. At reveille men stirred to find puddles on their blankets and under their blankets and in their blankets. As billet fires were taboo men began to cough, to sniffle and to awaken with buzzing heads and trench shins. No wonder they paraded in cues which drove our temperamental M. O. into fits of exasperation; no wonder they groused.

"If it wasn't for thoughts of that Christmas spread," I overheard one chap remark, "I'd jump this misery quicker than you could shake a hat. You bet I would. But—but think o' that dinner, bo!"

I went to the Old Man, back from his brigade conference, and let him know the feeling of the troops.

"Just as I said the other day," he declared, "we can not afford to fall down on this dinner business. How's my competition coming?"

"Rotten," I admitted.

"Canning?" he asked surprized-like.

Canning, I informed him, had not accepted my advice but had made a canvass of Falpart homes. At his mention of chickens doors had been slammed in his face. But Canning had continued to disbelieve facts and had done a little private investigating that had ended almost disastrously. True, he hadn't been made a shotgun target; but a hatchet had just missed removing his fingers as he was about to pull himself through a chicken-house window one night.

"Canning's stumped now," I ended.

"Bad!" said the Old Man. "And Meyers?"

Meyers' plan, I told him, had been at least original, if unlucky in its working out. Meyers had discovered the Falpart country to abound with partridge. Coveys were to be seen everywhere in the snowy fields. Meyers had tried to borrow a shotgun and shells. No luck! Then he had tried to buy. Still no luck!

Next he tried one of his company Enfields on the birds. It took patient stalking and clever marksmanship, but the birds made neat targets and Meyers was a good shot, and he had got along not too badly when misfortune smote him two ways. Occupants of a staff car traveling on the Falpart road had complained of the whistle of bullets about their ears. It had to be stopped, they said. Next thing Meyers learned from the French civil authorities that there had been a closed season on partridge for five years and that in settlement for his gunning he would be expected to contribute some five hundred francs to the town treasury.

"And now Meyers is stumped," I wound up.

The Old Man petulantly exclaimed—

"The same story from Blane, I suppose!"

"Well, not the same story," I confided, "but the same result."

"Don't want to hear it," fumed the Old Man. "Nor Caldwell's, either."

"That would be rather difficult," I said, and inwardly cussed myself for speaking out of turn.

"What would be difficult?" the Old Man caught me up.

"Hearing Caldwell's story," I said. "He's told me nothing to date. Too busy perhaps."

"Busy nothing," said the Old Man. "I know about how busy he is. Loafing around his billet, likely, most of the time. I'm afraid we'll have to make a change in Don company. Caldwell seems to have lost his initiative."

"Perhaps," I said regretfully, "but a change at this time wouldn't help the Christmas situation any, would it, sir?"

The Old Man admitted the soundness of my contention and told me to get the quartet together at tea that afternoon.

"I may have something to suggest," he declared.

At tea he threw down his serviette and got going.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it's three days to Christmas, and so far you've accomplished nothing. Permit me to offer a suggestion. Why not go after Madame Deuquet's ducks?"

"*What* ducks?" queried Sleepy Caldwell, surprized-like.

"Good lord!" exclaimed the Old Man. "You've never seen those ducks in the pond outside here?"

Sleepy's silence was answer enough.

"Why not go after them?" reiterated the Old Man.

"Madame won't sell," Canning spoke up. "I know, for I tried her."

"So did I," said Meyers.

"And I, too," added Blane.

The Old Man waved his hands impatiently. "But I fancy she will sell, gentlemen, if you approach her the right way. If the truth be known she's hard hit for money—with the war and what not. And like all her race she's proud. She swears she won't part with those ducks for love or money, but I know——"

"Yes, sir," we chorused.

"—that a thousand francs will buy them."

"Lotta money," said Sleepy Caldwell abruptly, "for some scrawny birds, tough as nails, likely."

The Old Man looked daggers but went on:

"One thousand francs, I repeat, if she ever makes up her mind to sell. That's where you gentlemen come in. You must make up her mind for her. It can be done, I fancy. Who'll take a whirl at it?"

"Here, sir," replied Canning.

"And here, sir," said Meyers.

"Right here, sir," added Blane.

Sleepy Caldwell, I could see, was hesitating over his decision. The Old Man beat him to it.

"I've already counted you out, Caldwell," he said in a tone that brought the red jumping to Sleepy's face.

"Yes, sir," said Sleepy, and slumped down in his seat.

Next morning, inspection over and done, I caught Blane stealing up the steps of the château. His arms were full of wrapping paper; big bits and little bits; every known color.

"What've you been doing?" I asked him. "Robbing the post-office?"

Blane grinned sheepishly.

"Sssh, Lewis," he said. "I'm telling you this in confidence. Madame Deuquet's cracked on philately. Last night I sat with her till she talked my head buzzy with watermarks and perforations and cancelations and surcharges. But when she told me she was shy on certain Canadian issues I brightened up. Right there I saw a way to her consent on the duck business. Look!"

For my inspection he held up a single bit of paper on which had been gummed at least one dozen stamps.

"Thank heavens there was a mail in," he gloated. "Just look at those seven-cent ones, there. That's the sort madame wants. When she gets them she'll be tickled to death. Then watch me go after those birds."

"Good luck," I called after him.

Shortly after lunch young Meyers poked his head into my room.

"Alone?" he quizzed.

"Sure," I replied, "step in."

He found a chair. Presently he unburdened himself.

"Say, Lewis," he singsonged, "mum's the word, but the old dame that owns this château is bugs on cars. Can you beat it? Now, lemme tell you, I wasn't a flivver salesman back home for nothing. Anything I ever learned I've got with me. What I have I hold and all that. Savvy?

"The old dame tells me that *après la guerre fini* she'll be in the market for a gas wagon of some description. And—can you beat it?—she's asked my advice on what and what not to buy. Already I've got her dizzy on transmissions and torque tubes and power plants and crankshafts—and still she comes back for more. One more call and I'll have the little deal closed. 'Stick your name on the dotted line,' I'll say, and the duckies will have a new owner. Savvy?"

"Good luck," I called as I had called after Blane.

As any one else under the circumstances would have done, I broke confidence and revealed to the Old Man the lines of attack pursued by Blane and Meyers.

"Bright boys," laughed the Old Man. "But watch this boy Canning; he's the brightest of the lot."

That evening the Old Man and I listened to bright boy Canning's assault upon the stone wall of indifference behind which Madame Deuquet had retreated. From the back of the château where the Deuquets hung out a lilting voice drifted to our ears.

"Maybe you don't know," stated the Old Man, "but madame lives and swears by that daughter of hers. And daughter—the frowzy-headed lump—is crazy on music. You've heard her piano going into all hours of the night, I'll wager?"

I admitted I had; that the doggone music-box had kept me awake plenty.

"Well," resumed the Old Man, chuckling, "Canning's back there now, throwing out his musical comedy tenor while little lump tickles the ivories—that's the right term, isn't it?—and while proud mamma enthuses over the possibilities of a match between the two. You know, Lewis, Canning's folks waddle in wealth. Leave it to Canning. He won't forget to mention that fact to the Deuquet crowd. And believe me, the boy will go to extremes to get those ducks and save the day for us. Listen? By the time he sings that '*Un poo dammer*' thing a couple more times he'll have mamma so mellow with consent to anything that the birds will be his for the plucking."

I sat up to finish a book thriller I had received from home. Lord knows what hour had been reached when a half-dozen of the most blood-curdling squawks cut into my senses and brought me to my feet. My first thought was of the long-necked birds in the pond. Grabbing up my gat and jerking on my cap and British warm, I cautiously let myself out of the building. I found everything inky black. I could scarcely see my hand in front of my face. It took me ten minutes, all of that, to grope my way to the edge of the pond, where now the squawking had petered out.

I strained my ears. From down the drive there was borne to me—or was I mistaken—the *pad-pad-pad* of feet. Crouched down, I waited another ten minutes. Not a sound save the *lap-lap* of water against the edge of the pool. That was all. Not a peep from the ducks; and it was so utterly black I couldn't make them out. I had to content myself with the thought that daybreak would reveal what had happened or what had not.

A BILLET inspection was the order of things next morning. The Old Man and I got away early. As we left the château I told him of my midnight alarm.

"Imagination," he promptly declared. "All imagination! Look! They're still there."

And he swung his hand in the direction of the island enclosure, where any number of ducks could be seen squatted on the snow.

"Who could get at them anyway?" he argued. "Madame wanted those ducks in a safe place; she didn't put them in the center of that pond for appearances merely."

I realized the truth of the Old Man's statement. Who could get at them, I asked myself? The water was deep, and the weather was more suited to skating than swimming.

The Old Man commenced to chuckle.

"I can't," he said, "keep the good news any longer, Lewis. The birds are ours. Canning put it over as I said he would. And at one sitting, too. A fast little worker is Canning. Got in deep with the family, I believe, but trust him to wiggle out of any tangle."

The Old Man was in fine fettle. All the way to Caldwell's company billets he whistled that Gaiety thing:

"Let us watch the ducks go by,
For their morning walk, dear——"

"And they'll be turned over to us this evening," he stopped whistling long enough to tell me. "Then, heigho for a very merry Christmas. Eh, what?"

We reached the barn, where we found Sleepy with a crowd of men around him. As we approached we heard him start throwing it into his troops.

"I told you what would happen if I found any man of my company guilty of theft—of attempted theft even. Last night one of this company went into the château grounds; and for no good purpose either. I met up with that fellow and, as you may have noticed, got decidedly the worst of the argument. I know that man's name. But, as he hasn't admitted his guilt, all of you must suffer the consequences. Tomorrow, Christmas Day, Don company will parade in battle order for a route march. The regular battalion dinner will be dispensed with."

Every one stood eying Sleepy. Sleepy's face was scratched in a number of spots. His breeks were spotted and wrinkled and gave off an odor suspiciously like petrol. There was a long tear in one puttee.

Not a murmur came from his men. They, I thought, took their medicine gamely. Not a murmur came from the Old Man. Apparently the Old Man believed in letting Caldwell run his company as he saw fit. However, I was certain that Caldwell wouldn't be running it much longer.

Later I got hold of Sleepy. Together we walked down to his billet. I bawled him out:

"Why didn't you make a try for that leave warrant? You've let Canning get away with everything."

"Perhaps," said Sleepy dreamily. "But I always trusted Santy Claus, and I haven't given up hope yet. You never know, you know."

"All rot," I scoffed.

A voice hailed us. Canning, walking chirpily, bore down upon us. By and by the three of us halted in front of Sleepy's billet. Over the door hung a sign from which wind and rain long since had washed most of the lettering. Canning had his eyes on the sign.

"That's an odd word!" he ejaculated. "What's it mean?"

I interpreted the sign but made no reply, for the door had swung open silently. A little old Frenchman, visibly agitated, hung in the doorway.

"*Non! Non! Non! Non!*" he chanted.

"All right; calm yourself," rasped Canning. "We're not coming in."

We moved away. Canning turned to me, saying:

"Lord! You'd have thought that frog was trying to hide something—he was that nervous."

I smiled and said—

"He did act kind of funny."

Looking back, I found Sleepy Caldwell still watching us.

Division's bombshell was nothing in comparison to the surprize packet Madame Deuquet handed us two hours later.

I guess I was the first to hear her coming. She came with a mad scamper of feet and little pig-like grunts which, to me, spelled trouble with a capital T. I got the Old Man out of his nap in time to take the brunt of her attack.

What she, in her excited way, told the Old Man would make a book-length yarn.

Boiled down, it meant immediate and *toujours* cancellation of her agreement with Canning. She had a lot to say regarding Canning. I think "libertine" was the choicest name she applied to him.

No! Positively no! The ducks would stay in the pond until she was good and ready to remove them. She would have nothing more to do with swindlers. We were no better than the "*Mo'real soldàts.*" She was broken-hearted. Her daughter was in her room, crying, too.

"*C'est la guerre—c'est la guerre,*" chanted madame and ducked out of the room.

For a minute or more the Old Man made the air blue, throwing anything and everything within reach. Suddenly he stopped and banged one fist against the other.

"Get Caldwell," he roared. "He came out of the Deuquets' quarters a short while back. I'll wager he's responsible for this muddle."

Caldwell came; squatted limply in a chair while the Old Man tuned up.

"Yes," admitted Sleepy, "I called on the dear old lady. And we got talking about the Christmas season, you know, and she told me that Major Canning had purchased her ducks. And I said how fine it was of him; that he always had the interests of his men at heart; that he was such a clean-living chap, always speaking so feelingly of his wife and kiddies back in Canada——"

"Good ——!" gasped the Old Man. "Did you tell her that Canning was married?"

"I guess I did," said Sleepy. "He is, isn't he?"

"Certainly, —— it," shouted the Old Man, getting purple in the face. "But we didn't want the Deuquets to know that. Good ——! Didn't you know that Canning went and engaged himself to that frowzy-headed daughter?"

Sleepy picked up his cap.

"How was I to know, sir?" he asked. "You never tell me anything."

"I don't, eh?" flared the Old Man. "Well, get this straight. I'll tell you something one of these days that you won't forget in a hurry."

"Yes, sir," said Sleepy and dragged himself off.

"MERRY Christmas, sir," I called next morning on sliding from my bed.

"Merry ——," came the muffled greeting from next room.

Padding about the cold flooring, I caught sight of a white slip under the door to the hallway. It was the work of a second to snatch it up and read it. I read:

Lieut. Col. Talbot, C. M. G., D. S. O.,
Officers and Other Ranks,
17th Battalion Cdns.,
Are Invited to Dinner, This Xmas Day,
—1917—
—AT YE OLD BARN—
Sheet 36 W.—Reference—A.4.c.65.45—
Look to Your Maps
And
—Let Joy Be Unconfined—

"What do you think of that, sir?" I inquired, thrusting the invitation beneath the Old Man's nose.

He gave it a half-glance, saying:

"Who's the joker? Confound his impertinence!"

Daylight dawned on me.

"I've got a hunch!" I cried enthusiastically.

"Play it," spat the Old Man. "Play anything if it will help clear up this muddle."

"Leave it to me," I chirped.

"I'll leave the whole shebang to you," said the Old Man childishly.

"Jake," I said. "We'll call battalion parade at once."

And I rang for a runner, into whose hands I placed messages for Canning, Meyers and Blane.

"How about Caldwell?" queried the Old Man.

I shook my head.

"You forget, sir," I reminded him, "that Caldwell's company is hiking today. They went out at daybreak, cook kitchen and all."

Christmas Day, 1917, is ancient history now, but I reckon it will never be forgotten by men of the 17th who slogged their snowy way along the Falpart road to the old barn of the unique invitation. Time after time the Old Man warned me:

"If this hunch of yours falls down, Lewis, you'd better hunt a new berth along with Caldwell."

But somehow or other I just knew it wouldn't fall down.

Men of the 17th will tell you to this day of the Christmas dinner they found waiting for them in the old barn; will tell you of their grinning host, Captain Caldwell, commonly called Sleepy, who planked them down at rough tables heaped high with roast fowl and vegetables and who stuffed them till it seemed they might pop open.

A merry Christmas will work wonders; even in extreme cases. It worked wonders with the Old Man, who climbed from his slough of despondency with indescribable alacrity, and who purred over his plateful like some happy kitten.

"Delicious," purred the Old Man, sinking gleaming teeth into a leg of fowl, crisped and seasoned to a nicety. "Delicious," he reiterated his contentment. "What is it, may I ask?"

"That," replied Sleepy Caldwell, hovering near by, "is what you might call—might call——"

"The satisfactory substitute," I put in quickly.

"Well said, Lewis," thrilled the Old Man. "Well said!" And he launched another attack on his plateful.

Presently Sleepy Caldwell called for three cheers for his cooks; three cheers for his waiters; and three cheers for *m'sieu* whom he dug up from behind the smoking kitchen and who turned out to be none other than the little old man Canning and I had seen at Sleepy's billet.

"Without whose aid," Caldwell explained to the diners, "this dinner would not have been what it has been today."

The cheers were given. Then, and not until then, did Colonel Talbot, C. M. G., D. S. O.—and one bar, not heretofore mentioned—rise to his feet, demanding an audience.

"Men," bellowed the Old Man when he had got a pin-drop hush, "I just want to lead you in three hearty yells for Santa Claus."

WE WERE all there when the Old Man handed Sleepy Caldwell his leave warrant.

"Have a good time, Caldwell," he said. "Permit me to say—ahem!—you earned it."

"Thank you, sir," grinned Sleepy.

A woman's scream from the château yard whipped into the room. Sleepy Caldwell, a strange look on his face, started from his chair. The Old Man hopped to the window, from which he bent his eye on the château pond.

"It's madame," he said, as more yelling reached our ears. "She's running up and down and tearing her hair. She went out a few minutes ago to bring in her ducks. The pond's frozen over. And by the looks of things she's found her birds frozen, too. Come to think of it, I haven't heard a squawk from the flock for some time now."

Sleepy Caldwell got to his feet.

"Well, s'long, gang," he grinned. "Got to be off."

The door slammed and he was gone.

More shrieks from the pond.

The Old Man said:

"Funny mixture, Caldwell. One is apt to misjudge him. Who would have expected him to stage the surprize he did? And that fowl! Delicious, eh? I guess we were lucky we didn't waste good money on those ducks. Long-necked things—tough as nails, likely."

"*Bang!*"

The door to our room had slammed open. Madame Deuquet, wild-eyed and breathing hard, stood on the threshold. In each hand she clutched a bunch of feathers.

"*Voller*," she cried and threw the feather things straight at the Old Man's head.

Sleepy wrote from Paris. Here's the very note; and this is what he wrote:

> "DEAR GANG:
>
> "I'm sorry I couldn't see my way clear to staying for the final curtain. When the dear old lady hollered the way she did I figured she had discovered all was not as well on her Potomac of a pond as appeared to be. You may have the thousand I won off Canning. Put it down as my contribution to the little box of heartbalm the dear old lady likely demanded of you. May I confess that I planned that Santy Claus dinner when we first came to Falpart.
>
> "At one time I had the doggone ducks bought for two hundred francs. I mean I could have bought them for that. Then you chaps commenced to run hog-wild on that competition business with the result that I had to do some tall stepping to land the birds a-tall. Thanks, however, to M'sieu Cauche, I was able to carry my plans to a successful end."

"Wait a moment!" It was Canning who had blatted interruption.

I stopped reading.

"One thing at a time," he said. "Let's get this M'sieu Cauche business straight. Who's he? What's he got to do with our story?"

"Why," I smiled, "Cauche is the little old frog, as you called him, with the funny-word sign over his door; in other words the taxidermist who built those dummy ducks that madame found in her enclosure. It's quite clear to me now."

"It does seem —— clear to you," sniffed Canning. "Just how much did you know, Lewis, about these goings-on?"

"Not a whale of a lot," I replied. "Except that several things had me puzzled. For instance, that first day by the pond, I wondered how Sleepy had got such a jag when, as I realized, he could put all of us under the table. And I also puzzled over his professed inability to swim when I knew, for fact, of many medals he had taken in that line of sport back home. I couldn't help thinking something funny. Then I had to puzzle over Sleepy's bedraggled uniform and the scratches on his face. You see, I had never heard of any one licking Sleepy in fair fight. What he figured in, I guess, was fowl fight; and what he got was a buffeting from some old drake's wings."

"Why the —— didn't you put us wise?" asked Canning pettily.

I grinned sarcastically.

"Being a judge," I said, "doesn't compel you to tell everything you know, you know."

Canning snorted.

"Finish the letter," the Old Man intervened.

I picked up Sleepy's explanation where I had left off:

> "I regret I had to sidestep the truth now and again. But you and your doggone ideas persisted in putting me in awkward holes from which I just naturally had to escape. Once I fancied Lewis was hep to my ways; that day it was when Cauche came to my billet door with duck feathers sticking to his garments. Ye gods! I threw several kinds of fits then."

"Did you see those feathers?" wailed Canning.

"I'm afraid I did," I answered.

"Bah!" snorted Canning.

The Old Man chipped in:

"Imagine Caldwell staging that route march; going to all that other trouble to maintain the surprize element in his party. Bright boy, I say. Initiative, I'd define it. Initiative!"

A moment of silence.

"This," I said, "is Sleepy's wind-up. Harken!"

> "And if Canning or Meyers or Blane should heat up any over my recital of the facts, I shall be delighted, on my return, tell them, to throw them, individually or collectively, into the pond there. Cold water's —— fine treatment for hotheads."

I wheeled on the trio.

"Any complaints?" I asked, tapping Sleepy's letter with my free hand.

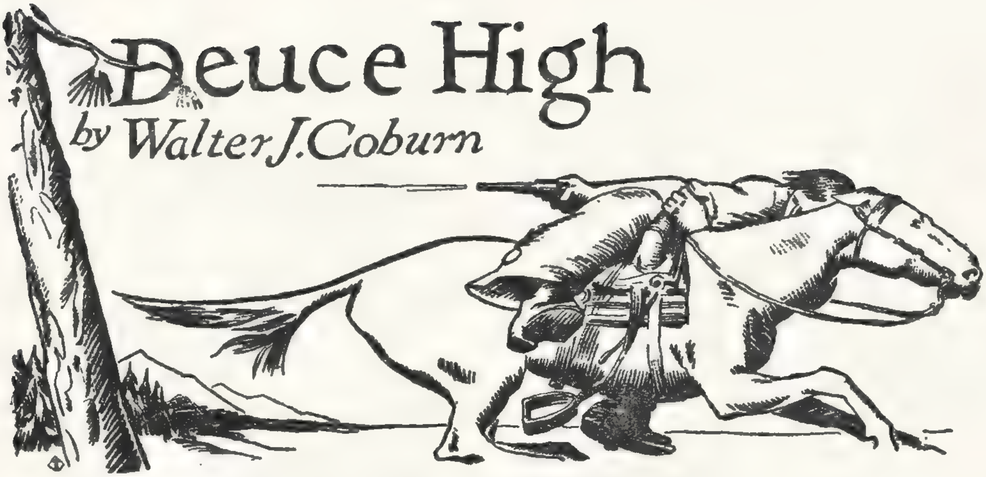
"Not here," growled Canning.

"Nor here," said Meyers.

"Nor here," added Blane.

Deuce High

by Walter J. Coburn



Author of "The Grub Line" and "Worked Brands."

WE CALLS this here boy "Wyoming" because he was one uh these gents that's fergot his name and didn't thank nobody fer joggin' his memory. It was some ten years ago that I meets up with him in the Devil's Basin country across the Mexican border.

We'd been workin' in the hills fer a week er ten days when this Wyoming boy drifts into camp. It's a mite past sundown and the light none too good, so fust off we taken him fer one uh Pancho's men. We're plumb spooky about this Pancho, savvy? So when that boy rides up to the rope corral where we're ketchin' of our night-hosses, he's covered by mebbyso ten-'leven guns.

But he never bats a eye-winker. No, ma'am. Jest sets his hoss a-grinnin' pleasant like, lookin' from one to the next gun like as if he's plumb used tuh sizin' up the wrong end of a six-gun.

"I hopes none uh you boys is inclined tuh be nervous on the trigger," says he in a kinda slow-speakin' voice. "I mightn't look like a white man with these whiskers and a few layers uh dust on my face, but if ary gent kin stake me to a razor and soap, my color'll show up like a clipped brand. Thus provin' the truth uh what sounds like a rash statement."

Them's his words, near as I recollect. This Wyoming feller has book learnin' behind him—savvy?—and he has them fancy words halter-broke.

"Lookin' fer work?" asks Bill Wagner, the boss, when the smoke-wagons is back in their scabbards and all hands is breathin' regular like.

"Just that," grins the boy. "Need ary man?"

"Which we shore do," Bill tells him. And he ain't lyin' none when he unburdens hisse'f uh that statement. And that's how Wyoming hires to the Lazy Y spread, which is on the wrong side uh the border gatherin' slick-eared stuff under permit from the Sonora straw-boss.

The boy ain't got no more bed than a jay bird. He's been usin' his saddle blanket fer a bed, livin' on jerky, mesquite beans and alkali water, and his hoss is ga'ant and rode down. But he don't ask no favors, not him.

"Son," says I, when he's finished grazin' and I've staked him to the fust smoke he's had fer a week, "yo're beddin' down with me. I snore a mite, and if the nights git crimpy I pulls the blankets, but the off-side uh that bed yonder is yorn."

I sees him swaller kinda, oncet er twicet; then he says in a sorter husky voice:

"I'm right grateful, pardner. It's been a long time since a man offered to split his blankets with *me*." And he laughs.

Mister, that boy's laugh hurt me worse'n if he'd broke down and bellered. There was a heap behind that laugh. A heap uh the bitterness that gnaws at a man's innards and makes a killer outa him. I'd heered one other feller laugh like that. A feller that was on trial fer killin' his pardner over a placer mine.

"Don't, boy," I says to him, kinda

gruff-like, I reckon, fer he'd shore give me a start. "Don't laugh like that."

"Beg yore pardon," he says like a kid might that's been caught stealin' jam outa his mammy's cupboard. "I'll not do it again."

And so fur as I know, he kept his word.

Wore out as he was, he shaved and took a bath at the lower water hole afore he turned in that night. He'd had raisin', that boy had. It stuck out all over him.

It was a day er two afore the question uh his name come up. We'd been jest kinda shyin' off from givin' him ary handle; savvy? All uh us bein' old hands and brung up thataway, we ain't a-goin' fer tuh make no breaks in perlite manners. It was the boy hisse'f that brings up the play one evenin' when we're a smokin' of a cigaret afore we ketches up our night hosses.

"Boys," says he, a slow grin a-spreadin' on his face, "yuh none uh you asked me my name. I'm obliged a heap and I shore appreciate the delicacy. But a man can't go around without a handle uh some kind. Supposin' yuh calls me Wyoming."

"That yore range, son?" asks some cow hand from up thataway, rearin' to augur some with a cow hand from his own country.

"No, it ain't," grins the boy. "I never set foot in the State. That's why the name Wyoming suits me so well. It's so —— noncommital."

And that's how Wyoming gets his handle.

As the days drags along like a slow-movin' trail herd passin' a dry water hole, we learns several things about Wyoming. He's the best roper in the outfit, sets a pitchin' hoss like he's built on the critter's back, and he's as quiet as a new kid at Sunday school. But man, how he does set around a-listenin' to the other boys swappin' lies of an evenin'! And he never laughs. Not oncet.

And there's another thing about the boy. He wakes too easy. Let a hoss git tangled in his stake rope, er a coyote yap, er ary noise bust the quiet uh the night, and Wyoming is sittin' reared up in bed with his gun in his hand. But I never lets on that I taken notice. That is, only oncet.

It was the night after our *pisano* hoss wrangler had been found dead in a little arroyo. Old Lorenzo was a shore good hand with hosses, and we mourns his loss consider'ble. Him bein' bushwhacked thataway shore gits the outfit ringtailed. It means one uh the boys has got tuh jingle the hosses; and, wuss than that, it means that this coyote of a Pancho Cordero is hoverin' around somewheres in them hills with his greaser outlaws. Kinda hoverin' like a flock uh turkey buzzards. It has us shore spooky that night. We sleeps with our boots on and our guns handy like. And we doubles the guard on the remuda.

It must'a' been clost tuh third guard time when the play comes up. Me and Wyoming had been on cocktail, the shift that takes the herd from the day herders, holdin' the dogies till fust guard time. And havin' rassled a heap uh yearlin's durin' the day, we beds down *pronto*. But I ain't too weary, as the feller says, tuh fergit about ol' Lorenzo and wonderin' when this Cordero aims tuh open up the jack-pot.

As I says, it's about third guard time, and I'm a-rasslin' with a bad dream. Sudden like my eyes flies open. I don't move. Jest lays there with my hand on my gun, wonderin' what's woke me. Then from the mess tent, which is dark inside, comes the low sound uh voices like some gent is talkin' to somebody else. And in the dim light uh the moon I sees a saddled hoss in front uh the tent.

"Shh!" It's Wyoming speakin' in a whisper, and he's grippin' my arm tight.

"What's wrong?" I asks, kinda het up fer a second. "It's jest one uh the boys come in off guard. Like as not he's woke the cook and the o'n'ary ole grub sp'iler is cussin' him out."

"It's a stranger," whispers Wyoming, and I sees now that he's plumb dressed and has his hat on. "Him and the boss is in the mess tent a-augurin'. I reckon it means that the law has done caught up with me."

It's too dark tuh see the boy's face, but there's somethin' in his voice that hits me under the ribs. Ever been alone in camp of a moonlight night when a wolf howls off in the distance? Sounds silly as ——, mister; but that boy's voice has that same far-off, lonesome note the same as a lone wolf's.

I puts on my hat, tucks in my shirt tail, and when the Wyoming boy eases past the corral to where his hoss is staked, I'm right behind him . And while I'm bringin' up the drag I'm thinkin' fit tuh crack every bone in my head.

"Hold yore fire a spell, son," I tells him as he jerks his cinch tight. "Yo're a-goin' off half cocked."

He pauses, his hand on the saddle horn. With that twisted smile a-pullin' the nigh corner uh his mouth, he shakes his head.

"I ain't in no position tuh take chances," says he quiet like.

"And I ain't aimin' tuh let yuh, son. You'll trust me?"

"Till ——'s a ice cake," says he.

"Then lead yore pony into that brush patch and wait till I come back. I'm goin' tuh take a look at that stranger's brand."

Seein' I mean what I say, and knowin' that he ain't a-listenin' to no danged pilgrim, he does as I asks him.

Bill Wagner and the stranger is still talkin' when I busts into the tent, casual like as if I'd jest come outa the blankets.

"Anything wrong, Bill?" I asks, steppin' over the bed in which the biscuit builder is doin' ten men's share uh snorin'.

"*Poco* plenty," says Bill, solemn as a hoot-owl; and I savvies by the way he says it that there's somethin' on his mind. He borries a match from me and gits the load off his chest.

"Pancho's got us surrounded. This is Pete McCloud, a Texas Ranger. Pete was on his way to the T O outfit and stopped tuh warn us. He's pullin' out in a few minutes fer the border. He'll get word to the Federal troops that Pancho's here. We got grub and ca'tridges fer three-four days. The Federals orter git here by that time."

"How many men yuh got?" asks the Ranger.

"Twelve," says Bill. "There ain't more'n a hundred peons follerin' Cordero, is there?"

"About that many," says the Pete gent.

"Then we're settin' purty as long as the ca'tridges and smokin' terbacker holds out. But I'm scared we'll mebbyso have tuh turn the cattle loose, —— the luck."

That was Bill all over. A cow hand from his foretop to his hocks. It was gallin' him like a raw cinch-sore tuh turn them dogies loose, and I can't say that I blamed him none. We'd worked hard gatherin' them critters.

THE Pete boy stays long enough tuh put away a few more sourdough biscuits and wash the bait down with what coffee was left. Then he high-tails it.

"Better tell Wyoming tuh go back to bed," grins Bill when the Ranger had pulled out.

"You knowed he'd took to the brush?" I asks.

"Shore thing. I talked loud enough so's he'd hear me and git the drift that I was powwowin' with a law officer. I weren't shore jest what Pete was ridin' thisaway fer."

"How'd yuh know the Wyoming boy wouldn't drag it fer keeps?" I asks.

"Because," chuckles Bill, "I knowed a old hand like you wouldn't let the boy do nothin' foolish."

And with that he waves me off to the brush tuh tell Wyoming that the time tuh run hadn't come yet. Don't never let nobody tell yuh that ol' Bill Wagner ain't a white man, mister.

Come daylight, Bill hisse'f rides to the herd. He's humped in the saddle like a dogy in a norther, and he's solemn as ——. Half an hour, and he's back with the boys that was on last guard.

"I done turned the herd loose, boys," he tells us, and he looks plumb beat. "Can't afford to take chances uh ary boy gettin' killed jest fer the sake uh a few dogy cattle which is all horns and tail anyhow. We'll close-herd the remuda, stay under cover and save our shells till we're sure uh downin' a peon every time we tightens the trigger. By playin' the game clost tuh our bellies we kin stick it out till he'p comes. Boys, she shore looks like we're du tuh earn that fightin' pay we draws from the Lazy Y."

It was a shore solemn-lookin' crowd that sets squatted around in the mess tent. We all of us knowed that she must be a tight place that we'd got into, er Bill 'ud never uh turned the herd loose. Yeah, we was shore solemn.

That is, all but Wyoming. He's settin' there, his gray eyes a-shinin' and a-lookin' happier than I've ever seen him look. You'd 'a' thought he'd jest been elected queen uh the May poles er somethin'.

Then somewhere off in the hills comes the pop-poppin' uh guns, and every man in the tent jumps like he'd sat on a rattler. Then, as quick as she'd begun, the shootin' quits.

I looks at Bill. The ol' cuss is kinda hunched like some ol' timber wolf that's standin' off the hound pack. And from the look in his eyes I knows he's thinkin' the same thing as I am. Them greasers has stopped the Texas Ranger!

Bill's lips is movin', but he don't make ary sound. And from the look on his face I knows that he's either cussin' er prayin'. It's a minute er two afore he gits a tail holt on his voice and makes words come out uh his system.

"That'll be Pete McCloud," he says husky like. "He was figgerin' on slippin' out by way uh the cañon where the lone hackberry trees stands. Mebbyso he's wounded and makin' a stand. We can't let him go out alone without makin' a stab at savin' him, fellers. Ary uh you boys hankerin' tuh foller me up the cañon?"

Wyoming is the fust one tuh get to his feet, but it's because he's younger than the rest uh us and ain't bothered none with rheumatics. He like tuh got tromped tuh death in the rush fer the tent door. Even the ol' cook joins the stampede, swingin' of a meat cleaver and lookin' desperate as he tries tuh buck off his apron.

"No use in all uh us goin'," grins Bill. "Supposin' me'n' Wyoming takes the fust crack. Two's a-plenty and not near so li'ble tuh be spotted. We go afoot. Cook, have plenty uh hot water and drag out that hoss liniment from my war sack. Pete may need fixin' up."

An' he did. He's wearin' three holes in his carcass, and all that saves his life is that the *pisanos* is usin' steel-jacket ca'tridges instead uh mushroom bullets. It's none other but the Wyoming boy who finds McCloud and packs him two miles through the brush to camp. Bill is busy as a bird dog with two tails, protectin' them from a rear attack.

There's one hunk uh lead in the Ranger's thigh, lodged ag'in' the bone. The other two holes in his arm and shoulder is clean.

"Reckon I'll have tuh probe fer that bullet in yore thigh," says Wyoming, businesslike as —— as he rolls up his sleeves. "There bein' no anesthetic handy, it'll be right painful. Reckon you kin stand it, McCloud?"

"I'll manage tuh tough it out," says the Ranger as he looks square up into the boy's eyes. "It's —— white uh you to fix me up, under the circumstances—Crawford!"

And I knows that there's some kind uh dealin' between Wyoming and the Ranger.

"The Lazy Y boys calls me Wyoming," says the boy as he bends over the Ranger. "If you don't mind——"

McCloud grins up at him, grittin' his teeth as the boy starts tuh locate that bullet.

"Make it New York if you've a mind tuh, son. Wyoming it is. Feels like yuh done located the slug."

And he had. But it ain't no fool's play tuh fish out a bullet with a bent wire fer tuh use in place uh doctor's tongs. The sweat breaks out on McCloud's face, and I looks fer him tuh pass out. But he don't. He jest looks into Wyoming's face and tries tuh let on that he's grinnin'.

He don't fool nobody with that grin. I sees a couple uh the boys slip outa the tent, lookin' plumb white, and I don't know as I'm blamin' 'em. Bill Wagner's off in a fur corner, cussin' soft but fervent as he watches the Ranger show his toughness.

I'm standin' there with a basin uh hot water and bandages cut from the last two clean dish towels that stands between the cook and poverty. And I don't know that my hand's a-shakin' like I was took with chills until Wyoming straightens up, holdin' somethin' in the palm uh his hand.

"There she is, McCloud," he says as he tosses the bullet on the mess table, then turns tuh me.

"Lay the basin on the table afore yuh spill the water all over us," he says, reachin' fer a bottle uh carbolic acid that's settin' there.

He's as steady as if he was used tuh the job; but I notice that he's as white around the gills as them two boys that made a break fer the fresh air a while back.

A big jolt uh water and a cigaret kinda braces the Ranger while Wyoming washes the wounds with the carbolic solution and fixes the bandages.

"Fast work," says the ol' grub sp'iler, who's —— on timin' anything. "It took jest five minutes."

And I'd uh swore that I'd been standin' there over a hour!

"Yuh must be a old timer at the business," says Bill, admirin' like.

"No," says Wyoming in a kinda weak voice as he fastens the last bandage. "It's my fust attempt."

And with that he sets down weak like, and his hands is shakin' so's he spills half a sack uh terbacker tryin' tuh build hisse'f a smoke.

And there's more than one gent in that tent a-wonderin' which is the gamest man, McCloud er Wyoming.

THIS happens in the mornin'. And we spends the day layin' low and waitin' fer somethin' tuh happen, which it don't. It begins tuh look like this Pancho feller is aimin' tuh kinda starve us out. Come night and about first guard time, Bill pops out the subject that's been layin' back in the brain uh every man in the outfit.

"Boys," he says in that there rumblin', camp-meetin' voice uh his, "we're in a tight place. We got one bet. That is, fer some gent tuh make a try at gettin' past Pancho's men and ridin' fer help."

Now we all had knowed what Bill was goin' tuh say. Every man there knowed it. And we'd all been feelin' the way a man feels when he's about tuh fork a bad hoss. And now that it was said, we all breathes freer like that bad hoss weren't such a snake as we figgered. In less time than it takes tuh tell it we're all a-fightin' tuh see who goes.

"Keep yore shirts on, cowboys," advises Bill. "We'll let the cards decide it." And with that he draws a deck from his jumper pocket.

"How about Wyoming and them other boys that's guardin' the hosses?" puts in some boy. "Do we wait fer them tuh come in, er do we draw afore they come and let them pick their cards when they git here?"

"Might as well start the drawin' now," says Bill, shufflin' the cards. "I hear 'em corrallin' the hosses now. They'll be here in a minute." He lays the cards on a kyack box and nods fer me tuh cut 'em.

Which I does. Then Bill glares around at all uh us fer all the world like a schoolmarm that's tryin' tuh locate the kid that's just hit 'er in the back uh the neck with a spitball.

"Which uh you gents has a wife and kids at home?" he growls accusin' like, as if it was a crime tuh raise a fam'ly. "Speak up, gents."

Not a dang peep outa ary man. Bill looks het up.

"Don't set there like a lot uh buck Injuns," he growls. "Come clean."

Reluctant like, two uh the boys pleads guilty tuh havin' a wife and kids bogged down somewhere across the border.

"You two gents is out uh the cuttin'. Go on out to the corral and send them other boys in," says he and stands his ground firm as —— against the argument they puts up.

"Now," says Bill when the two married gents has gone, "we start the cuttin'. High card wins. The man that draws low card makes the try fer the Federal troops." And with that, the game opens.

One by one we steps up and draws our card from the deck. I'm the second man tuh draw, and I backs off into the corner a-cussin' at the queen uh hearts. Just as I sets down near the door uh the tent, in comes the two boys that's been on hoss guard with Wyoming, and I sees by the look on their faces that they've been told what's goin' on in the mess tent.

Anxious like I looks fer Wyoming; but he ain't in sight. Then I peeks around the corner uh the tent, and over where my bed is layin' I sees a match flare up and sees the boy humped over somethin'. Then the match is blowed out, and Wyoming steps into the tent.

We've all drawed cards now except him. Low card is the four uh clubs, and Bill Wagner is a-holdin' it.

"Yuh gotta go low tuh beat me, Wyoming," says Bill; and hanged if I know whether that ketch in his voice is on account uh his bein' tickled er whether he's tryin' tuh cover up his disappointment.

He ketches my eye and gives me a shore hard look. Because, yuh understand, I know somethin' that no other man in the Lazy Y knows. Bill has a wife and two kids in El Paso. He's made me swear I won't say nothin' about it. Says he got us into the tight place, and he aims tuh take his chance with the single gents.

"Unlucky at love. Lucky at cards," says Wyoming in a quiet voice; and outa the tail uh my eye I sees him look over to where Pete McCloud is layin' on the cook's bed.

Then he picks up a card from the top uh the deck.

His spur seems tuh ketch in somethin', and he kinda loses his balance, fallin' like and upsettin' the candle. There's a second uh dark, when Wyoming lights it again. He straightens up, and there's a queer sort uh smile on his lips as he holds out the card in the palm uh his hand.

"Sorry tuh deprive yuh uh the pleasure, Bill," says he in the happiest tone I've ever heered him use. "But I've drawed the deuce uh spades!"

Does old Bill Wagner kinda straighten up like he's breathin' more free? It looks thataway to me. And I ain't blamin' him.

He's took his chancet like a man, Bill has, and it ain't fer me ner ary other human tuh hold it ag'in' him fer not feelin' cut up about losin' his chancet at throwin' his life away, fer that's what it means, like as not. There's only two trails a-leadin' outa the basin, and it's a cinch bet that both them trails is heavy guarded.

Fer a minute she's quiet as —— in the tent. Then Wyoming looks over to where Pete McCloud has hitched hisse'f up to a sittin' position. He don't say a word, Wyoming don't, but there's a sorter pleadin' look in them gray eyes uh his that's askin' some question.

"Uh course it's all right with me, Wyoming," says McCloud, and mebbyso it's the flickerin' light that causes it, er the terbacker smoke, but from where I'm settin' it shore looks like there's tears in the Ranger's eyes.

"I'm obliged, McCloud," says Wyoming, like as if he'd asked fer a match and Pete had staked him tuh one.

Then the boy turns tuh the rest uh the outfit.

"I'm pullin' out in a few minutes, boys," says he. "And mebbyso this is the last chance I'll ever have tuh thank yuh all fer the way yuh done by me. Yuh never asked me no questions. Yuh treated me like I was one uh yuh. And yuh called me friend. I don't reckon you boys savvies how much it means to me. Yuh jest nacherally *can't*. Because none uh you has ever put in seven years uh his life hidin' and dodgin' and buryin' hisse'f in the hills when he's starvin' fer the sound of a human voice. Seven years. Seems sometimes like it was seven thousand years."

He kinda choked up fer a minute and had tuh swaller the lump in his throat afore he could go on.

"I killed a gent seven years ago," he continues. "Killed him in a drunken row over a woman that I'd never laid eyes on till that night. A woman with bleached hair and a painted-up face. This gent had refused tuh buy her a drink and I was liquored enough tuh think he'd insulted her. I forces the fight; and when he goes fer his gun I downs him.

"Twenty-one years old, boys. Jest outa college, where I'd worked my way along. With a tail holt on the world and a downhill pull, I loses all I've worked for when that bullet leaves my gun.

"But it ain't my lost chances that makes me lay awake nights, a-lookin' up at the stars and prayin' tuh God fer a fresh deal. It's the fact that I killed that man. Who he was, I don't know. But he was a human bein' the same as me, a-lovin' life as much as I was. And I'd done took away that life. Men, there ain't a court in the world that kin hand me a harder sentence than I've give myse'f the past seven years. No country, no name, and not a man tuh shake my hand and call me his friend. A ——, dodgin' coyote.

"Fom my hideout above the basin I watched you boys work. Watched till I couldn't stand it no longer. Then I come down and for the first time in seven years took my place among white men. And here, in this tent, God has give me what I been prayin' fer. My chance!

"McCloud knows my story. He spotted me today when I found him up yonder in the boulders. Knowin' that I couldn't never go back to that coyote life that was worse than hell, I gave myse'f up. And now the chance has come tuh sorter make up fer the killin' uh that man.

"I ain't askin' no favors, boys. I don't want what I ain't got the right tuh ask fer. But I wisht you boys could fergit my lowdown, o'n'ary past and remember me as jest Wyoming."

And oncet more he turns to the Ranger.

"If I git through alive, McCloud, I'll be waitin' fer yuh at the border."

And before ary man kin find his voice, he's gone. Bill's the fust tuh pull his words outa the bog.

"Foller him!" he says to me hoarse like. "Ketch him afore he pulls out and tell him—tell him— Yuh know what tuh tell the boy! Quit a-standin' there like a cow waitin' tuh git milked! Vamoose!"

Which I does. Pronto. And I locates Wyoming as he's swingin' into his saddle.

"I was hopin' you'd foller," he says, so low that I scarce kin hear him as I grips his hand. "You been like a dad tuh me, and I want tuh thank——"

"I never follered yuh out here tuh be thanked," I growls hot-like, fer I'm havin' —— tryin' tuh keep from bellerin' like a kid. "I jest want tuh tell yuh that every man in the Lazy Y is a-prayin' fer yuh this night. They'll be purty poor sorter prayers; but I reckon the Big Boss up yonder savvys our language even if it ain't got no fancy trimmin's. And son, don't go worryin' no more about that gent yuh downed seven years ago. Mebbyso he weren't much account noways, and yuh like as not saved him from a bad end. And if McCloud takes yuh back to the States tuh stand trial the Lazy Y will be on hand tuh see that yuh gits a square shake. Good-by, son, and God bless yuh!"

He bends over and grips my hand without sayin' a word. I hears him kinda sob. Then he whirls his hoss and is gone. Somethin' small and white flutters down and lands at my feet. Somethin' that's dropped outa his pocket. Kinda absent-minded like I picks it up and walks back to the tent.

THE boys is all a-settin' right where I'd left 'em. Nobody is sayin' a word. Fer oncet that wind-jammin' ol' biscuit builder of a cook ain't runnin' off at the head, and I can't he'p but recollect that old sayin' that it's a plumb bad wind that don't do some good somewhere.

"Yuh told him?" asks Bill anxious like.

"I told him we was prayin' fer him. And pray we're goin' to," says I, lookin' around at the crowd.

"Well, yuh needn't look so danged desp'rit about it," growls Bill. "A man 'ud think from the way yore a-lookin' that it was a shootin' scrape instead of a prayer meetin' that yuh aimed tuh start. And whatever is that yo're holdin' in yore hand? Yuh drawed the queen uh hearts, but yuh don't need tuh go packin' it around the rest uh yore life."

And I realizes that I'm still packin' that card that's dropped out Wyoming's pocket But it ain't no queen uh hearts that I'm holdin'. No, ma'am! It's the *ace uh spades!*

Fer a minute I stands there stupid like, starin' at that card. How come Wyoming is packin' that ace uh spades? Then, like some gent has prodded me with a hot iron, I savvies.

Bill's deck uh cards still lays on the kyack box. I grabs them cards up, and my hands ain't none too steady as I runs through 'em. A second and I finds what I'm huntin'. Without a word I tosses the card on the table. It's the deuce uh spades!

"What's the idee?" asks Bill, no doubt thinkin' I'm goin' loco.

"There's a deck uh cards in my bed," says I. "Fetch 'em quick."

Which he does. I runs through the pack. The deuce uh spades is missin'.

"Wyoming played a cinch, gents," I tells 'em. "Afore he comes into the tent tuh draw his card, he slips the deuce uh spades outa *my* deck. Mind when he upsets the candle? It's then that he switches the cards on us, shovin' the ace into his pocket and showin' us the deuce uh spades. We only sees the face uh that deuce, mind? He shoves it in his pocket because it has a red back instead uh blue, like Bill's deck has. No, boys, Wyoming didn't aim tuh be cheated outa his 'chancet,' as he calls it.

"By rights then I'm the man that should uh gone," says Bill like he's talkin' tuh hisse'f. And I knows he's a-thinkin' uh that wife and kids in El Paso. "God!"

"Amen tuh that," sings out the cook, who's kept quiet so long that he's swole up like a hop-toad.

Don't let no hand try tuh tell yuh that ol' High Pockets ain't a shore top round-up cook, fer he is; and he builds the grandest son-of-a-gun-in-the-sack as ever give a cowhand the bellyache. But his mammy should uh ex-tracted his voice apparatus when he's a yearlin'. My spur rakes up along his shin bone accidental like, and fer the time bein', as the feller says, High Pockets' mind is kinda took off his speech. He's a-puttin' in the next ten minutes a-wieldin' of the liniment bottle and cussin' scan'lous.

And that gives Bill a chancet tuh say his say, which he couldn't never uh done lessen he knocked ol' High Pockets between the horns with a neck yoke. Bill looks at me grateful like, gits his line on the idee that's millin' around in his system, takes his dallies and drags out a mouthful uh words.

"Ary gent here got a Bible?" he growls at us. "Speak up, dang yuh. It ain't nothin' tuh be ashamed of."

But there ain't nary Bible in camp.

"Lorenzo was a-packin' of a set uh them rosary beads," says some boy, "but they was planted with him."

"Don't know as they'd do us ary good noways," says Bill sorry like. "None uh us bein' of the same faith as Lorenzo, we wouldn't know how tuh work 'em."

Don't get the idee that Bill's speakin' light uh ary man's religion. Fer he ain't. Cow-hands is like Injuns thataway. If a man's got religion, he's respected fer it. And while we don't none of us say grace afore we tackles our grub, bein' 'most always in a hurry and havin' got purty well weaned away from our mammy's teachin's, still we all of us has a heap uh respect fer them as does know the ropes. And I've seen some mighty tough hands, when the end uh their trail was in sight, ask fer a sky-pilot tuh help 'em find a easy crossin' over the Big Divide.

Bill looks around, plumb desp'rit.

"——! Ain't none uh you boneheads ever got religion?" he growls.

"I traveled across the Nation oncet," says a Texas boy, kinda hopeful, "with a Quaker doctor spread."

Bill whirls on him, quick as a rattler strikin'.

"Why the dad-blamed —— didn't yuh say so afore? Git on yore laigs and let's have 'er, both barrels!" he bawls at the Texican.

"Don't know as I recollect much about the fine points uh the game," admits the boy, plumb shameful. "Yuh see, my part uh the act was tuh shoot at glass balls throwed in the air. Used fine birdshot, savvy? I was kinda loaded up with bitters and tonic, which was what the boys useta drink in the Territory, and what mite uh preachin' the doc done didn't stay bogged down in my haid, so tuh speak. All I kin mind offhand is that he uses "thee" and "thou" a —— of a lot."

And that cuts the Texican into the culls. It's up to Bill tuh play the joker. And he does.

Since then, I been tuh a heap uh churches, camp meetin's and sech, and some uh them sky-pilots shore slings out some fancy prayers. But I ain't ever listened tuh none, ner reckon I ever will, that could make a man feel as clost tuh the Big Boss as Bill does when he gits warmed up. 'Way down inside uh his heart he's a-thinkin' uh them kids uh hisn and the wife that's a-waitin' fer him. And while he don't use no big words, he talks straight out like a man.

He tells uh how this Wyoming boy is like a maverick whose mammy has died in a norther, leavin' him tuh shift fer hisse'f. Whipped outa the herd and shiftin' fer hisse'f, without no horns ner a mammy tuh look after him. Jest a-driftin'.

"Lord," says Bill, "all us boys is tough hands, a-driftin' the same as that boy is. And mebbyso some uh us has been as o'n'ary as Wyoming. We're plumb ignorant about religion, as Yuh kin see fer Yorese'f; but we're all ashamed right now, I reckon, that we done paid so much attention tuh liquor and poker and let our souls kinda pick their own trail. But shucks, there ain't no use in goin' into that. You know what a triflin' lot cowpunchers is. I'm jest explainin' how nary man in camp here is a holdin' nothin' a'gin' the Wyoming boy.

"Jest give him a square deal tonight, that's what we're all a-askin'. The sky-pilots all claims Yo're square, and I reckon Yuh are. And I reckon You savvy what that boy's been through and how he's come out white. There ain't many men that's got the nerve tuh do what that boy done tonight. And it don't seem right, somehow, that You'd let him get killed by a murderin' *pisano* like this Cordero coyote. Which I reckon Yuh won't.

"As fer us boys here in camp, we ain't a-askin' fer nothin' that we ain't got comin'. We're purty o'n'ary, I reckon; but we won't holler if the deal goes the wrong way. Jest a square deal, God, that's all we want. And—and much obliged."

"He means 'Amen,'" corrects High Pockets, a-slappin' at his eyes with the off corner uh his apron.

But Bill's lookin' thoughtful like out the tent door and don't hear. Leastways he don't take the trouble tuh argue the point.

McCloud's a-layin' back, a-settin' of his teeth tuh keep from groanin'. Nobody says nothin', and we're bogged to the hocks in thought.

Then *bam!* And we're on our feet, a-clawin' at our smoke-poles.

"We've been blowed up!" whispers some gent as I throws my hat over the candle. And nobody doubts his word.

We crouches there in the dark, expectin' we don't know what. The hair along the back uh my neck seems tuh be reared up. That there explosion sounded like it was just outside the tent. But nobody seems tuh be hurt; and while I sniffs the air like a houn' dog, drat my speckled hide if I kin smell ary sign uh burnt powder. Only a kinda sweetish, plumb pleasant smell. I hears a feller sniffin' along side me; then he groans Miser'ble, like he was mebbyso shot in the belly.

"Hurt bad, pardner?" I asks, a-edgin' closter.

The gent cusses low and methodic, and I

recognizes the voice as belongin' tuh High Pockets. That there smell gits stronger.

"Ruined! Plumb ruined," groans the Dutch-oven rassler. "Fer ——'s sakes, light a match. Mebby we kin save a hatful anyhow. Dad-gum it, I shoulda stuck to the rules I had, 'stead uh drappin' in that last handful uh raisins."

I reckon more'n one gent has recognized that there raisin brandy smell by now, fer half a dozen matches flares up and there's a stampede in the direction uh where that liquor keg has blowed up. High Pockets like tuh knocked a hip down roundin' the tent pole. But it ain't no use. The sand has soaked 'er up pronto, and a sand lizard coulda lapped up what's left uh that joy water. It's a sad procession that files back into the tent.

"Better stick tuh lemon extract, High Pockets," says Bill kinda nasty like, fer I reckon he was a-thinkin' how a big horn uh licker 'ud he'p things tuh look brighter. "Stick tuh extract and leave the makin' uh moonshine tuh them that ain't punched dough so long that what little brains they had as a baby has been used up learnin' how tuh make a kidney stew. How many yeast cakes did yuh put in?"

"Five," admits the ol' pot-hook warrior, defiant as ——.

"And the rules says one. Wonder we wasn't some uh us killed," growls Bill. "And you was roarin' the other day because yuh wasn't mayor uh El Paso instead uh a round-up cook. It's mistakes like that that's put yuh where yuh are."

"She'd uh been plumb potent," sighs High Pockets, a-lookin' like a mammyless calf at a round-up. "Plumb potent. I throwed in a dash uh liniment fer flavorin'." And he kinda sniffles.

But he gits nothin' but hard looks.

I WON'T try fer tuh tell yuh about how we sets around that night a-waitin' fer the shots that means that Wyoming has been stopped. Them hours was shore long drug out. Come daylight and not a shot had been fired, and we knows that the boy's made the grade.

Follers a day and night uh waitin'. And Pancho and his *hombres* makes a few charges which nets 'em nothin' but *poco* plenty hot lead. We're madder'n a pack uh yaller-jackets by now. Grazin' on short rations and smokin' gittin' low. So whenever a Lazy Y gent looks along his carbine sights he gits hisse'f a peon.

We taken a heap offen this same Pancho from time tuh time, as the sayin' goes. A-dodgin' and runnin' some tuh keep him offen our trail. But we're plumb through runnin', and we tells him so every time we pulls a trigger. Tells him in the only language he savvies.

He makes a play at compromisin'. Says he'll stake us to a horse apiece and let us hit fer the border. It's our cavvy he wants, he explains. Bill tells him how we feels about it.

"These hosses," says Bill, bawlin' it out from behind the big boulder where he's layin', "is ours. Every hoss in the cavvy packs a Lazy Y. And nobody but Lazy Y boys fork 'em. And the low-lived, yaller-hided polecat of a greaser never drawed breath that's man enough tuh take 'em off us!"

He backs up his words by drillin' a hole through Pancho's high-crowned hat.

And mind yuh, Bill's a-makin' that fight talk on a empty belly. But he had kin-folks at the Alamo, Bill had, and hates Mexicans wuss'n pizen. We cheers him vigorous, and the Quaker-doctor Texican downs a careless peon jest tuh show he's agreein' with the boss. And thus the peaceful hours flops by, as the po'try gents says.

Come daylight uh the follerin' mornin', and yon side uh the Devil's Basin opens up with what listens like the battle uh Bull Run. Only more louder. And a hour later the Federal troops rides down tuh camp a-singin' handsome.

There's a undersized, gold-braided, red-britches general a-ridin' in the lead. There's red on his coat sleeve that ain't been put there by the tailor, and the nigh side uh his face is opened up neat by a Mauser bullet, but he's a-grinnin' like he was on parade. Even Bill and the Quaker-doctor gent owns up that there's some Mexicans that's —— game gents. Which Bill tells him, right out. That half-portion li'l ol' cuss of a general bows stiff like, then flops over on his hoss's withers, fer he's fainted.

Bill and the Federal doctor patches him up neat and business-like. Then the doc works the Ranger over.

"What 'come uh Wyoming?" we asks as the general sets fire to a 'dobe cigaret.

Since the general ain't got no idee uh who Wyoming is, he kinda looks like as if he's done heered us wrong. But seein' the anxious looks we're a packin' of, he does his dangest tuh set our minds at rest.

"Wyoming?" says he, a-showin' of a full set of the whitest teeth I ever seen. "Wyoming ees still jus' where your United States *Presidente* pu heem. Land of the free and long may they wave!"

And he swells out his chest fit tuh bust every brass button on his coat.

Then from the tent door comes a funny sound that's a sorter cross between a sob and a laugh. And we whirls around tuh see a ga'ant, ragged gent a-standin' there. Yuh guessed it; it's Wyoming hisse'f. Nigh petered out from no sleep and some nasty knife cuts which he gits the night he runs the rebel guards.

"Here I am, McCloud!" he croaks, and tosses his gun at the foot of the Ranger's bed.

Then his knees gives under him and Bill ketches him as he falls.

DID Wyoming stand trial? I'd tell a green hand he did. And it takes the jury less'n five minutes tuh clear him. They like tuh tore off their dewclaws a-climbin' outa the jury box tuh shake the pris'ner's hand.

The Lazy Y is there entire. From Bill Wagner tuh ole High Pockets. And it cost us fifty dollars fer a new roof which we plumb spiles when we empties our smoke-poles by way uh showin' our sentiments.

Backed by book learnin', such as Wyoming has, a man kin go a shore long ways in ten years. Yeah. Folks down Texas way knows him as the Honorable Lee Crawford, the fairest, squarest jedge that ever held down this here job as straw-boss uh the Soopreme Court. But to a few uh us bench-legged, o'n'ary ole cow hands he's still Wyoming. Wyoming, the gent that owns the Lazy Y and signs our pay checks.

CLOSE-IN LANDS OF ADVENTURE

by Raymond S. Spears

PEOPLE who keep their gaze too much on the horizon often miss the things they would like most to see close at hand. It is so in seeking adventure, in traveling, in thinking too much in terms of thousands of miles. Often, just around the corner lies an unknown land, as strange as anything to be found on the far side of the continent.

Strange people live in the recesses of the Ramapo and Catskill Mountains in sight of New York City, and in the Adirondacks, the Green Mountains, the Alleghanies—the farthest lands of the continent have no more interesting conditions than within a day's automobile drive of Manhattan Island.

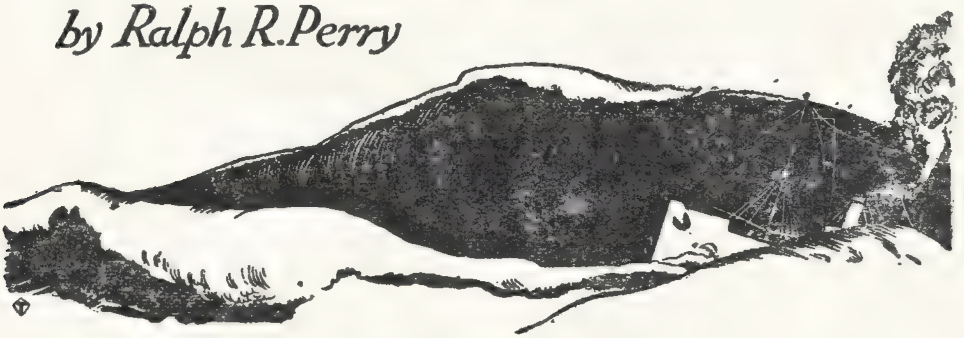
When the urge to wander far comes, and one has only a week's vacation or perhaps two weeks', it seems almost useless to try to crowd into so short a space of time the experience, travel, adventure for which one longs. But it should not be forgotten that the strange and unusual is within a day's run of any city, any community, in the United States. Out from Chicago lie the Lake Michigan marshes, the shell rivers, the sand dunes, the back countries of many river bottoms. Maine, New Hampshire, western Massachusetts, lie within a day of Boston. New York has from the Adirondacks to the wilds of eastern Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh has the feudlands, the dying struggles of the old Whisky Rebellion in the Alleghanies, Lake Erie, the Ohio shantyboaters, the big woods along the New York border. No city has a greater variety of back country than Pittsburgh.

St. Louis, with the Missouri, Mississippi, the Ozarks, has even fewer varieties than, for example Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We are accustomed to think of the great West as a land of varied interests. Life in Nevada is simpler, has fewer variations, than can be found within a day's run of Albany, New York.

Those who study their opportunities never lack for experiences!

The Atlantic Takes a Hand

by Ralph R. Perry



Author of "Stowed Away."

CAPTAIN DAN WILLETT bit clear through his cigar in his anger and spat away the butt contemptuously.

"You're not accusing me of smuggling, are you?" he snapped.

"Not at all. Quite the contrary in fact, Captain Willet, as you will see if you think over what I have been saying," the customs inspector responded suavely.

He was a gray, square-cut man; gray of hair, with pale lips and a square chin, dressed in a gray suit, with only the force and keenness of his glance to indicate the detective. His colorless voice and appearance were in striking contrast to the crisp brown hair and nervous intensity of the sea captain, who was beginning to smoke again in short, angry puffs as the inspector continued to outline the case.

"As I have been telling you, we are convinced that some one aboard your ship is smuggling in valuable jewels. Note that we do not merely suspect, Captain. We are sure of it. For nearly a year our agents in Paris have reported the sale of very valuable stones. Worth ten, twenty thousand dollars apiece, Captain. Very large rubies and emeralds. Stones for an Eastern raja or an American millionaire. All our force watches for them at the customs, but—" the inspector waved his hand deprecatingly—"we find them first displayed on the throat of some wealthy woman. Always we can trace the sale to one jeweler. You understand, Captain, that although we know he is smuggling, we can't convict him of it before a jury. He declares the stones were bought in America. It's nonsense. He knows it, we know it, and all we can do is watch him grin at us!"

"But where do I come in on this?" Willett demanded.

"We have shadowed the jewelers in Paris and have spotted the smuggler. He is a member of your crew. His name is George Schwartz."

"Like you to pick the best quartermaster that ever twisted a ship's wheel," commented Willett bitterly. "But all right. If you're so sure he's a crook, pinch him. Or I won't sign him on. I'm not going to have the *Sachem* under suspicion, and that's flat, Inspector."

A mirthless smile twisted the inspector's lips.

"On what charge shall we arrest Schwartz?" he asked ironically. "And if he gets a berth on another ship, will that stop the smuggling?"

The inspector's leveled forefinger shot across the desk almost into Willett's face.

"We want to get Schwartz with the goods," he said. "We want to find out how he does it, and prove to him that he can't make a monkey of Uncle Sam. I've asked you here because I need your assistance and support. As a loyal citizen and a law-abiding seaman I must ask you to do me a favor.

"Say nothing. Do nothing to lead Schwartz to suspect. Only, you must sign one of my operatives on as a quartermaster on your ship. His job will be to shadow

Schwartz day and night the whole voyage, drink with him, travel to Paris with him, become his buddy and win his confidence. To do that he must be a quartermaster, as Schwartz is."

"Which means you want me to make myself a kind of uncle to a Judas," Captain Willett growled, chewing on his cigar in disgust. "Well, all right. I can't say no, much as I'd like to. But what kind of a sailor is this operative of yours? I've a duty to my owners as well as to Uncle Sam, and I don't fancy helmsmen that steer over half the North Atlantic. Wastes too much coal. Who's your man?"

"Meet Harry Young, Captain!" The inspector beamed with the effusive geniality of a man who has just obtained his own way.

Willett wheeled in his chair, and measured the candidate with a deliberate, hostile glance. Slowly the captain's lips pursed, and he uttered a low prolonged whistle, plainly audible to every one in the room.

"Maybe he's a good detective," Willett grunted as an after-thought. "But I'll have to tell the mate he's my sister's son, 'cause it's a cinch he ain't a sailor!"

The young man who was the subject of these aspersions flushed painfully. He knew that he looked like a consumptive clerk better fitted to measure ribbon than to follow the sea. His face came to a point in a large, long and prominent nose. Above it rose a sloping forehead, two pale blue eyes and a thin little thatch of yellow hair. Below lay a receding chin and a mouth with prominent teeth like a rabbit's.

"I've been practising steering at the Seaman's Institute," he muttered.

He hadn't wanted this assignment, but the shrewd old inspector had insisted.

"Lucky," Willett commented drily. "It'd be luckier for you if you'd learned something about it."

THAT the captain had not overstated the case became apparent as soon as the *Sachem* put to sea and Young began to stand his regular two-hour trick at the wheel. In calm weather his lessons ashore made him a passable helmsman, but months and years of steering are needed to develop that sensitiveness to the buffeting interplay of forces between ship, wind and sea which enables a skilled quartermaster to steer a vessel as if he were guiding a living thing.

Young's steering was mechanical. The fault became obvious one morning when the *Sachem* was off the Grand Banks and Captain Willett was peering over Young's shoulder into the binnacle, preparing to put the ship on the great circle course for Brest. It would be the largest and most important change of course on the voyage. He could sense the nervousness of the inexperienced quartermaster as the ship's head started to swing. In his excitement Young put the helm too far over.

"Meet her!" Willett grunted.

It was too late. Young threw the helm hard astarboard, but still the momentum of the turning ship swung her head to starboard, a point beyond the course. There the hard-over helm checked her sharply, and she swung to port again so rapidly that she yawed widely before Young was able to steady her on the proper point.

Willett snorted.

"Ain't you got no feel for a ship, Young?" he demanded with bored irritation. "You'll never make a helmsmen!"

"She got to swinging," the detective muttered.

"Of course she did! Can't you feel her under your feet? Do you have to look at the lubber's point to see what she's doing? Man, by the time it shows on the card she's begun to swing, and it takes too much helm to stop her. You ain't as bad as I figured you'd be, but you steer like a wooden dummy."

Young's narrow shoulders stiffened obstinately, but he made no answer, and the skipper strolled out on the bridge. The chap wasn't so bad as he had expected at first, at that, he reflected. For a correspondence school sailor—Willett grunted with the contempt of the skipper who has fought his way up step by step from the forecastle—Young showed up pretty well. He'd be the kind they liked in the Navy, probably. Intelligent. Oh, yes. A bit too nervous and anxious to please. And drat it all, his first impression of the boy had been wrong. Already it seemed likely that Young would put handcuffs on Schwartz before the *Sachem* nosed into New York again.

Not that he had unearthed any clues in the first few days at sea, but because, to the unconcealed amazement of the skipper, Young had already made himself Schwartz's buddy. Off watch the two were always together, and although the reason puzzled the skipper, any sailor could have told him that it was because Young possessed a qualification greatly to be desired in the forecastle of any ship on which the crew had been together for several voyages. He was a good listener to whom Schwartz could tell all his old yarns without being rewarded by groans. He had an enormous fund of new anecdotes and experiences inland in cities the smuggler had never seen. In addition he would square his narrow shoulders to anything on the ship, from a job of stowing chain cable to the boatswain himself.

Young's pop eyes and timid face were no indication of his courage, which was indisputable. For all of these reasons, wherever Willett heard Schwartz's booming, boastful baritone he would find Young leaning somewhere not far away.

With the officers the detective was not so popular. He was always prowling into unlikely places about the ship, which exasperated the mates' sense of the fitness of things. Willett was forced to issue secret instructions to let the man alone, and although the mates thought the captain was exhibiting barefaced favoritism to a relative, the skipper knew that Young wished to learn every likely hiding place on the ship. However, the captain could do nothing to help the boy's nervousness. He was not only a bad helmsman, which any watch officer can testify is nuisance enough, but he was too eager to be of service to do any good. For instance, only the day before he had reported icebergs when there wasn't a berg in sight.

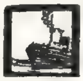
The *Sachem* had received an ice warning, and Willett had doubled the lookouts. Young, who was at the wheel for the last two hours of the mid-watch, had no responsibility beyond keeping the ship on its course, but when the first false dawn threw a grayish-yellow light over the sea the second mate noticed he was continually looking up from the compass card and peering out across the tumbling gray toward the fog-streaked horizon ahead. Many helmsmen have that trick, particularly if they are a little farsighted and want to rest their eyes, blurred from steady peering at the binnacle. The mate thought nothing of it, till all at once Young's face became stamped with surprize and horror. His eyes popped from their sockets.

"Ice!" he ejaculated.

"Where?" the mate snapped, scanning the sea directly in front of the ship's bow, for Young's expression was one of sudden immediate danger.

"All around the horizon, dozen of them!" gasped the quartermaster.

The mate peered, rubbed his eyes, looked again and cursed Young for a fool. There was nothing there. Simply one of those tricks an overimaginative man's eyes will play on him toward the end of the graveyard watch. But after such incidents all the mates hung over the compass when Young was on duty. They made his life miserable, but his steering rapidly improved under their snarling and profane instruction.



ARRIVED at Brest, the *Sachem* was able to discharge and load her cargo in five days. On the third day Schwartz and Young left together for Paris, and during their absence Captain Willett occupied his mind at odd moments by wondering what success the detective was having there. It was with the keenest interest that he watched the pair returning to the ship together just before sunset on sailing day. The *Sachem* had pulled out and was anchored in the roads, and the two quartermasters were sitting on the forward thwart of a motor sailor. As they started up the gangway the captain leaned over the bridge-dodger, anxious to overlook no detail.

He noticed that the faces of both men showed the marks of hard pleasure and sleepless nights. Even now they were slightly unsteady on their feet from a last bottle of cognac on the train, but while Schwartz's brunette features were flushed with hilarity and his air proclaimed him at peace with the world, Young followed him up the ladder pale with the effort to control his faculties, watching every motion of his quarry.

At the head of the gangway Schwartz stumbled and caught at the rail. As if by accident, Young also stumbled, fell against the same spot and, though his hand was concealed from Schwartz by his body, Willett could see his hand groping under the rail, feeling for anything which might have been deposited there.

Unsteadily Schwartz lurched up the deck, apparently far more intoxicated than the skipper had ever seen him before. He caught at the gunwale of a lifeboat, laughed foolishly and weaved forward toward the forecastle, disappearing within its dark door with a whoop and a stumble. Young followed him grimly, never more than three feet behind. They were not in the forecastle more than five minutes, only long enough to change into dungarees, and then Schwartz reappeared and mounted the ladder to the bridge.

Young was still behind him, but stopped on the deck, for it was Schwartz's trick at the wheel, and the ship was about to get under weigh. Nevertheless, the detective's eyes followed the other into the chart house, observing every fumbling motion with which Schwartz tested the engine-room telegraphs, pawed into the flag locker, unlocked the wheel and opened the binnacle. Preoccupied as Willett was with the responsibility of getting his ship under weigh, he could not fail to miss the expression of chagrin and bewilderment that gradually spread over the detective's countenance. After the ship got under weigh Young dived back into the crew's quarters.

"Searching Schwartz's bunk and clothes, I'll be bound," Willett muttered to himself, and glanced at the man intent at the wheel.

A faint grin was playing about the corners of Schwartz's lips. He had the air of a man who has done a good job, and knows a joke of which the point will be destroyed if others learn its secret. Despite his uncertain step a few minutes before, the captain saw he was steering a hair-line. Many quartermasters can, of course, even when their tongues are thick with liquor. A good helmsman steers automatically. Yet this time Willett suspected that Schwartz could have walked as straight as he steered if he had wished to combat the effects of liquor by the force of his will. He had walked unsteadily for a purpose. Willett was not altogether surprized when there came a knock at his door late that night and Young slipped inside.

"I gotta get your help, Captain," he announced unceremoniously.

Willett looked up with a mute question.

"Oh, he came aboard with the goods, all right," the detective confessed. "We were thick as thieves in Paris. He was trying to get me ossified all the time, and finally I let him slip away, after tipping off another man to watch him. He went straight to the Rue de la Paix, to the jeweler that's been handling the stones, and after he was gone our man found out he's gotten an emerald. Just one stone, square-cut and big as your thumbnail. The duty on it's more than enough to make it worth while to send a man who brings back nothing else. He had it in his vest pocket when he came down on the train with me. I know, because I fell against him and felt it through the cloth. In the boat coming aboard I saw him slip it into his hand. And now it's gone."

The detective swallowed painfully.

"Captain, I wasn't a foot from him the whole time," he cried wildly. "He changed his clothes in my sight. I know he didn't hide it going up to the bridge, but he must have! I've been over every foot with a fine tooth comb, felt every inch of it, shook out every signal flag, searched his clothes, his bunk, every part of the forecastle. He took a shower when he come off watch, and I went through the clothes he wore. I'm too old a hand to be fooled by hollow shoe heels, shaving soap and hidden pockets. He hasn't got it in his mouth, either. And the worst of it is, I think he knows I'm a customs man. He's been grinnin' at me!"

"Well?" Willett interrupted curtly.

"You've got to let me search the ship, that's all!"

"Thought you had searched it, from what you said. Won't you pick up this emerald when he tries to take it ashore in the States, anyhow? No good to get it now, that I see. It's no crime for a sailor to buy jewels. If you knew where it is, he'd just declare it unless you pinched him smuggling it ashore."

The detective shook his head in misery.

"He's too slick, Captain. There's a million ways of getting a stone off after we dock. Toss it into a barge. Drop it overside with a buoy. There's a big organization waiting for him in New York, you understand, that can afford to spend thousands on the job. If he was carrying it himself as I expected I might be able to watch him, but once it's hidden my instructions are to get it the minute our declarations are in. He won't admit he's got it unless he's compelled to, and a declaration after seizure by the customs makes him liable to a fine. But you understand I can't watch him every second the whole cruise!"

"Maybe he's got an accomplice in the crew," Willett suggested, chiefly for the sake of saying something.

"No, sir!" contradicted Young. "He's playing a lone hand. He hid it while he was walking from forward to the bridge, under my eyes. You've simply got to let me hunt. Oh, I'm a —— of a detective!"

"Hunt and be ——!" the captain acquiesced.

He liked Schwartz, and there was something in this cat and mouse game, which won a man's confidence only to betray it, which offended his sense of fair play. Smuggler or not, Schwartz was a first rate sailor, and in his heart Willett did not think it such a very heinous crime to defraud the Government. Not one half so bad as being half a point off course whenever a watch officer's back was turned.

"Sure, hunt around," he added more affably.

Young rose with a sigh.

"It's so darned small, Captain!" he groaned. "I wish you'd help me, sir. If you find it you get a percentage of the fine, too. It'll amount to two thousand or so."

In spite of himself Willett grinned at the detective's lugubrious tone. He had not mentioned this reward until he had lost faith in his own ability to win it.

"That'll pay off the mortgage," he agreed with a cheerful nod, and promptly forgot all about the incident, for beginning with the third day out the *Sachem* started to make a flying passage home.

AN EASTERLY gale got under her stern and hung there. For five days it blew without a let up, rising to a moderate gale and sinking to a fresh breeze with the wind hauling and veering from east, northeast to due south. The sky was continually overcast, with only brief glimpses of a sun breaking redly through scudding clouds. Navigation was uncertain. The ship steered wildly, with a heavy following sea constantly under her quarter, so that dead reckoning was largely guess work, and the rain squalls that swept across the ship day and night set the men snarling at each other from the irritation that springs from wet clothes. Young's days were purgatory. Schwartz's friendliness was a thing of the past, and it was he who christened the detective "Pop Eye," never passing him without a jeer.

And indeed Young wandered around the wet decks like a homeless, bedraggled cur, coughing from the exposure and pale with the anxiety. Every morning when he passed the skipper for the first time he shook his head slightly in utter discouragement. He had asked to be assigned the duty of boatkeeper, and to the profane wonder of his officers, Willett allowed him to swab out the lifeboats and paw through their gear. With a wobegone, set, pale face he climbed the rigging. The engineer had to run him out of the fire room with a coal scoop, and roared that he'd bash his long nose in if he saw him below again as the little man scurried before him up the deck.

Schwartz took to whistling impudently between his teeth, and dared to ask the detective if he'd lost anything. Then, a day out of New York, it came on to blow, and all hands had too much to do to bother with the worry-crazed quartermaster, who had only twelve hours more to find a tiny pebble on a large ship or to report failure to his chief.

The glass began to fall in the forenoon watch, and all day long the wind increased steadily in force. The sea rose with it, and the long days of uninterrupted gale from the same quarter gave an ominous weight to the long, heavy combers that pushed by at express train speed on the same course as the ship. The distance between the waves was twice that usual in a gale, so that a sloping gray wall of water forty feet from trough to crest and sloping back for fully five hundred feet would heave up mountainously under the *Sachem's* stern, burying her nose deep in solid green water and stopping her dead. Propellers raced madly in the thin foam at the crest. The ship would be lifted like a skiff and hurled bodily forward, spouting water from the scupper ports in the well decks while the white wave crest would leap up and snatch at the dangling life boats and thunder by with a final snarling hiss along the ship's side like the tearing of wet, heavy canvas. Then the bow would shoot into the air as the trough passed, the stern would drop, and it was all to do over again.

Had the storm not risen so slowly Willett would have put his pride in his pocket and turned about to meet these seas head on. For even a ship as big as the *Sachem* was in genuine danger. To steer in a following sea is always difficult. The ship would not answer her rudder when her stern was in the air, with the buried prow checking her way. Continually the seas flung her off her course, yawing to port and starboard in spite of the desperate work at the wheel. A slight yaw was dangerous. A bad one meant that the ship would be struck broadside on by a mass of water weighing thousands of tons and moving thirty miles an hour.

Willett was in for it. Rain was falling heavily. He was approaching the coast uncertain of his position, and he clung to the bridge, dashing the water out of his eyes with a heavy, impatient hand, while he waited for a report from aft, where the third mate was trying in vain to get a sounding with the deep sea lead. As long as there was plenty of water under the keel things might be worse. Willett could only hold on, trail oil bags, watch the barometer and pray for the sea to moderate. To change course now was to precipitate the disaster he sought to avoid.

He had not intended to allow Young to take the wheel, but the wheel was relieved before he realized it, and when Willett did look inside he saw a mate standing at the detective's elbow, conning the ship in a low voice. Young's face was white and scared, but he was obeying orders mechanically and the ship was steered as well as before. The third mate reported bottom at one hundred and ten fathoms and brought a sample of gray sand which the soap in the end of the lead had brough up from the bottom. Willett pored over the chart, seeking to verify his position.

Gray sand! There was gray sand at that depth in scattered spots for twenty miles along the coast. He went to the bridge again, oblivious to the pitching and heaving of his vessel in his anxiety over her position. Night was falling, and in a few hours more he would be driven either into the harbor or on the lee shore of Long Island or Jersey.

Up and down the deck heaved. Blinding wind-driven rain cut into his face. Straining plates creaked underfoot; the rigging overhead sang and boomed in the gale. So, for two hours. Men gathered at the forecastle door and, watching their chance, dashed across the decks knee-deep in water, racing to avoid being caught by a wave as they went to relieve the watch on duty. With his face exultant Schwartz pounded up the bridge-ladder toward the chart house and stopped an instant, stooping over the flag locker.

Then it happened.

Topping the bridge ladder, Schwartz had noticed that the lashing holding the flag locker in place had been worn through and broken by the pitching, so that the heavy box was rocking and about to break loose. He had stooped to pull the lashing tight and retie it. Inside, over the wheel, the mate was turning over the ship to his relief, and for an instant his attention was distracted. Young, catching sight of the man he suspected, knowing that it was now or never that the other must recover his emerald, and seeing him stoop near the locker, had leaned away from the compass to peer out of the chart house door.

In that instant one of those bigger, seventh seas, which had raced clear across the Atlantic gathering momentum for this blow, swept mountainously out of the darkness astern. From aft came a desperate shout. A seaman half-way across the well-deck took one look and jumped like a madman for the weather rigging, climbing as high as he could and wrapping himself around the shrouds like a limpet. The *Sachem* dropped into the trough, yawed to port, swung broadside and began to roll.

Instinctively Captain Willett held his breath. About that roll was something awe-inspiring and deadly. It was so slow. The deck slanted to starboard as a great tree falls before the ax, leaning a little at first, then faster and faster. Willett's body was accustomed to the normal rolling of his ship in a gale. She rolled to the angle at which she should have paused, but when that point came the deck was still falling away under his feet. The lifeboat carried aft of the bridge swung out in its davits, and the foam-smeared wave seemed to reach up and touch it. Touch it—no more; yet the boat was gone, crushed to match wood, and the heavy triple block of the boat-falls was flung in an arc ten feet upward onto the bridge. Its hook tore a six-inch gouge from the rail at his elbow. Still the *Sachem* rolled. The well deck was buried in green water.

"She must be over forty degrees!" Willett whispered to himself.

The ship paused on her beam ends, and in that instant of time, before the next wave had time to strike Willett pulled himself hand over hand along the rail and clawed his way into the chart house and the wheel over a deck too steeply pitched to walk upon unsupported.

The mate was rolling against the lee side, trying to crawl to his feet. Young still clutched the wheel, though he had lost his feet, and hung with only the whites of his eyes showing in a pasty face. Willett kicked loose his hands.

"—— you, you took your eye off the compass!" he swore out of the corner of his mouth and whirled the wheel down to starboard.

Inconsequentially he wondered what things were like in the engine-room. Men flung into the machinery though the engines were still turning over. He hoped they'd keep way on the ship. There was a chance, if they could, that he might swing her head around if the next sea didn't clean them out! Little seas usually followed a grayback like that. He hoped so.

Back the *Sachem* rolled, slow and lifeless beneath the burden of water on her deck. Back; and down, down, deep to port. But not so far. Braced against the wheel, Willett peered to read the fate of the ship in the compass card. If her head could be swung from west, through south, to east, if she could meet the sea bows on, he'd win yet.

Something was wrong with the compass. The gimbals should have kept the card level no matter if the ship had stood on its head, but instead the compass was still canted at an impossible angle to starboard, though the ship was heeled far in the opposite direction to port. Half the spherical brass bowl usually concealed by the binnacle case was visible. A sticky gray protuberance on the bottom of it was wedged against the bronze ring of the gimbal. Willett pulled away the obstruction with his forefinger. It was hot from the electric lamp and stuck to his finger until he wiped it clear against the corduroy collar of his oilskins. The compass swung into place. It showed the ship heading southeast. He was making it, then.

Simultaneously came a gasp of triumph from Young and a shouted imprecation from Schwartz. Young scrambled to his feet and threw his arms around the captain's neck, dragging him from the wheel. Schwartz flung himself headlong from the top of the slanted deck against the detective's knees, knocking all three sprawling into the lee of the charthouse. Young was crying with excitement and allowing Schwartz to swing short-arm jabs into his face without an attempt to protect himself, so intent was he in clawing at Willett's collar. The three tangled figures rolled twice from wall to wall. One mate hurled himself on the pile, throttling Schwartz, the other had reached the wheel and still held it hard over.

As the ship steadied itself on the new course, head into the sea, and began to pitch on an even keel, Young gave a squeal of joy and broke away from the struggling group.

"I've got it!" he screamed.

"Sink my ship, will you?" panted Willett, and swung a wild blow at the detective's head.

The latter ducked and twisted out of reach of Schwartz's clutching hand.

"Hold him. He's under arrest," the detective breathlessly ordered the mate, retreating before the enraged captain until his back was against the wall. "I've seen the emerald," he repeated.

"You've turned my ship to junk, that's what you've done. A man at the wheel has no business to see anything," snarled the skipper, but he stopped none the less.

"What do you mean, emerald?" he growled.

"It was stuck on the under side of the compass in a wad of chewing gum," the detective explained rapidly. "We never would have found it if the ship hadn't yawed and rolled. Schwartz knew that I'd never think of turning the compass upside down, with a man in front of it all the time trying to steer by it. That roll was worth a thousand dollars to you, Captain," he crowed, "and it shows the customs can't be fooled by the cleverest smuggler out of jail."

Deliberately Captain Willett spat on the deck at Young's feet and stared at the excited little man until the flush of triumph receded from the thin pointed features and the detective stood bewildered and abashed, nervously rubbing the chewing gum from the emerald with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand.

"I suppose you're proud of yourself for finding that gewgaw?" the captain demanded.

The detective nodded.

"You filthy landlubber! And for *that* you'd risk drowning ship and crew!" retorted Willett from between clenched teeth, and, turning on his heel, he strode aft to superintend the clearing of the wreckage from the deck of his ship.

The River Trail

A Complete Novelette

by Leslie McFarlane

LIKE the bears in the mountain country to the north, Wakina sleeps in the winter time; also, like the bears, it wakens with the break-up and is lazily active until the snow falls again. It slumbers drearily under winter snows, rousing to activity with the first caressing winds of spring—rouses to the only activity which justifies its existence.

Wakina is not a town, not a village, not even a hamlet, for the true hamlet varies little with the seasons. It is on the railway, but it has no station, merely a weather-beaten hut whereon hangs a tin sign, with the name of the place upon it. Bored passengers on the transcontinental trains, if they glance at the sign at all, wonder idly why men live in such forsaken places.

The Missabi, flowing north from the railway toward James Bay, supplies the answer. For Wakina is a fur trading post and, although in winter it slumbers, in the summer it becomes atune with nature and even grows; crude hovels and tents springing up to extend its meager borders. With the break-up come the Indians, debouching from the vast, mysterious lands of the Missabi, with their fat, placid wives, their brown, quarrelsome children and, most important of all, their furs.

They come to the long, low trading store, an architectural nonentity, which was a source of profound amazement to them when it was first built, and there they traffic with a gravity appropriate to the magnificence about them.

They hand over their bundles of furs, treasure trove from the winter silences, lapse into gloom when the factor deducts the amount of the previous season's debt from their credit, then brighten up as they gutturally discuss the merits of the guns, the traps, the blankets, the gay bolts of gingham and calico—anything on the crowded shelves that may catch their vagrant fancies. Then, proud in the possession of luxuries from a world other than their own, they live about Wakina for the summer, idling in the pleasant warmth, improvident as the sluggard of fable, until the dry leaves whisper to them in falling that they must turn again their faces to the north.

Wakina was sleeping now, for it was mid-January. The trading store, its wide roof heavy with snow, sprawled in the feeble sunlight, its windows, somber and impassive, staring out over a dead whiteness. Gentle smoke, drifting from a chimney, was the only sign of life. The railway hut, small and a bit pathetic in the solitude, was almost hidden by a huge snowbank. A few shacks, occupied by the Indians in the summer, were now only white mounds near by and, had it not been for the curling smoke above the store, one might have thought Wakina bereft of all living things.

There were two people in the trading store, however. Zotique Larose, a wiry little French Canadian, had appeared from the fringe of pines along the river bank a few minutes before, shouting gruffly to his dogs, which were now sheltered in the stable back of the post, and he now sat with the factor, Hugh Munroe, beside the stove in the big store.

Zotique was puffing with satisfaction at a venerable pipe, a haze of smoke already around him. His mackinaw and moccasins were cast aside and he sat there comfortably, in his shirt sleeves, his stockinged feet near the fire, while Munroe, elaborately casual, tipped back in his chair and waited for Zotique to speak—which would be when Zotique had the chill out of his bones and when the tobacco rendered him content; not before.

So Munroe, a ruddy, broad-shouldered young man, rolled himself a cigaret and whistled idly, as if it mattered not to him if Zotique should decide not to talk at all.

"I go see four, fi' Injuns," said the French Canadian at last, fingering the stubble of beard on his chin.

"And——"

"All tell same t'ing. Dat feller Joe Moon take away all furs dey got."

"With money or booze?"

"Mos' time whisky *blanc.* Sometime money—not much."

"How far up did you go?"

"Not ver' far. I only go up Spruce Lake, den I go back in from river for see Injuns. All say same t'ing, so I tell me, 'What's de use go any farder?' So I come back an' tol' you."

"You did right, Zotique. That was all I wanted to know—if Joe Moon was out again this winter."

"Oh, dat feller out again, you bet. Him worse dan evaire. Dose pore —— of Injun, he get dem so dronk dey not know what dey do and den he go 'way wit' deir fur. *Sacré!* Dat feller Joe Moon should be pinch, eh?"

Zotique spat against the stove to express his hatred for the villainous Joe Moon, and puffed ferociously at his pipe.

For Joe Moon and his liquor were causing trouble.

THE winter previous, Joe Moon, a great giant of a man, evil, unscrupulous, and wise in all the ways of the north, had come to the Missabi section. Where he had come from no one knew, but so forbidding was Joe Moon, and so callous was he to all the laws of God and man, that none dared inquire.

It was said that he had been hounded out of Northern Quebec by the redcoats. Hard as iron, contemptuous of all the perils of the trails, Joe Moon had arrived in the Missabi region and had turned to a means of livelihood which bade fair to net him a fortune unless the redcoats learned of it and turned their attention to him again.

Going up into the fur country in the depth of winter, Joe Moon took with him whisky *blanc* to trade with the Indians, and they, weak in the face of temptation, readily gave him their furs for the liquor. Not always was it whisky *blanc*, quite frequently it was mere rot-gut, and not always did the Indians desire to trade, but a few friendly drinks—and they would part with furs, with anything they had, for more. Joe Moon traveled tirelessly back and forth on many trips, each time bringing out a great load of furs to be sold to the Jewish buyers at the railway, east of Wakina. He avoided the trading post for he knew he was exploiting the Indians without compunction and he knew that he was ruining the fur trade of the Northland Company at Wakina.

"Last season was bad, Zotique," said Munroe reflectively, as he blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"I guess she was worse ever seen here, eh?"

"The worst ever. And it looks as if this season will be just as bad."

"Dat pretty tough for you, yes?"

"It's worse than that."

It would be pretty tough for him. Munroe, the youngest factor in the service of the Northland Company, was facing a problem which threatened to oust him from a position for which he had worked hard and served well. He had been placed in charge at Wakina the previous winter, after five seasons as assistant in another company post on the line of the railway, and his first year of responsibility had been one of utter failure. It had been so bad that the big chief in Montreal had written him a tart and uncompromising letter, hinting that another such season would mean his finish.

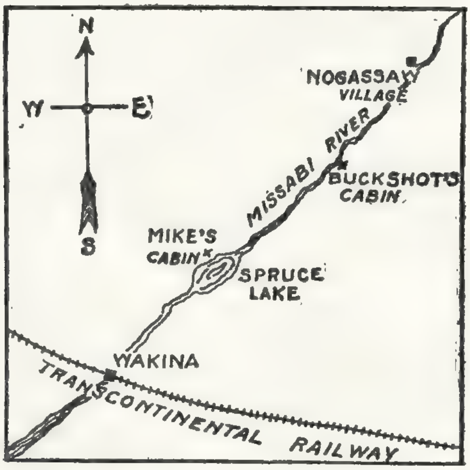
And now Zotique Larose brought him news which seemed to indicate just that consummation.

It was not his fault; but the big chief in Montreal did not look for causes. He looked for results, and the man who could not produce them was cast out forthwith. The Big Chief in Montreal would not have understood if he had been told, how Joe Moon could wreck the once flourishing fur trade at Wakina, but Hugh Munroe could understand it only too well.

He knew that when the Indians came out from the north last break-up, with fewer furs than they had brought out in years, while Indians came out to other posts of the company with the best catch in a decade, it had been because Joe Moon was at work.

The big chief in Montreal could not understand how an independent trader could cut in on the Wakina post to any appreciable degree, for the Indians of the Missabi had traded at Wakina for years, and depended on the post for the necessities of life. They were kept in a fealty of debt, for when they left for their traplines every fall they were invariably in debt to the company for grub and equipment and a considerable quantity of the winter's catch would go toward wiping out that debt the following spring.

They had no disposition to bargain with the independent trader who might go up into the fur country, for prices fluctuate greatly in the fur game and the independents could rarely afford to gamble by offering them higher prices than they would get at the post, so the Indians, being avaricious, played safe and traded where they got the most for their furs—which was at Wakina.



The big chief in Montreal knew these things, and he was right in thinking that the ordinary independent could affect the Wakina trade very little. But Joe Moon was no ordinary trader. When he went up into the fur country after Christmas and visited the traplines all winter long, giving the redskins liquor for their best furs, he left little enough for the Indians to bring to Wakina in the spring. Joe Moon had made money, much money, for he got the furs for a song, and waxed prosperous, while the Northland post at Wakina had the worst year in its history.

The big chief in Montreal couldn't be expected to understand all the ins and outs of this. He looked over typewritten sheets on his desk and saw that the post at Wakina, with Hugh Munroe in charge, had barely shown a profit, and he concluded that Hugh Munroe, however good his past record, was evidently too young for responsibility. He had even grumbled at himself for a soft hearted fool because he had decided to give Munroe another chance, one more season in which to make good or get out. That was the way the big chief in Montreal had looked at the matter.

And now Munroe saw another year of failure looming ahead. He had sent Zotique Larose up into the fur country to see what he could see. And Zotique had seen. There had been some rumors that Joe Moon had taken himself elsewhere at the close of the previous season, and Munroe had held hopes. But plainly, Joe Moon was back again.

The police could help, perhaps. The damage had been already done, the previous season, before Munroe knew of Joe Moon's activities and, while even then his first impulse had been to notify the "mounties," caution had restrained him. Joe Moon might not come back, and police action could not undo the damage he had done. It would be hard enough to get evidence against him, at that. The punishment for giving liquor to the Indians is severe, but the clam is a veritable chatterbox compared with the redskin questioned as to the source of his liquor.

Mounted Police might roam the Missabi region from end to end and fail to find an Indian who would give evidence against Joe Moon. They would simply become sullen and silent when questioned and no amount of interrogation would wrest from them a word against the trader. So Munroe had decided to keep quiet in the hope that Joe Moon had left for good.

In any case, he did not care to appeal to the police. It was his own fight. To him, there was a savor of weakness, an admission of defeat, in appealing to the law. Even now, when he knew that Joe Moon was back again, he hesitated to notify the mounties. It would mean days of delay, perhaps weeks before Joe Moon could be apprehended, and even if his rival were brought to book at last, it would be too late to save Munroe.

"DAT Injun, Mike, up on Spruce Lake, he tell me he sell Joe Moon ten beaver, eight marten, t'ree fox, for two bottle of booze," went on Zotique. "I tell him he one big fool. He say he know dat now, but after he drink a leetle he sell everyt'ing he got for more whisky. Same way wit' all de oders."

Munroe nodded. He remembered the Indian, Mike, up on Spruce Lake. The redskin had come to Wakina last break-up with a few beaver and mink, and a collection of muskrat skins which Joe Moon had refused to buy, and all else he had to show for his winter's trapping had been a penitent countenance and some empty bottles. The furs had not paid his debt to the trading post for the food and supplies which he had brought up into the bush with him the previous fall, he had lived in rank poverty all summer and was in deeper debt than ever to the company when he set out again.

There had been other Indians in a similar plight, with the exception of some fortunate souls whom Joe Moon had somehow overlooked and who had, accordingly, lived in the lap of luxury all summer, the envy of their crestfallen and repentant fellows. Munroe remembered giving the Indian from Spruce Lake a severe lecture and he had been duly shamed and admitted his folly. Like the others, he had promised to stay clear of Joe Moon's blandishments in future, and trade only for money or goods, but it was as Zotique said—

"After he drink a leetle he sell everyt'ing he got for more whisky."

That was where Joe Moon had the edge. Had he been an independent trader, in legitimate competition, he would not have been dangerous, but the liquor altered everything.

"And you think it'll be the same old story, eh, Zotique?" said Munroe. "The Indians will come down here in the spring without enough furs to make it worth while dealing with them."

"Same t'ing as last year," grunted Zotique, tapping his pipe on the edge of his chair and reaching for the can of tobacco near by. "Mebbe a lot of dem Injuns not even pay deir debt. Next fall dey want more supply an' want for you trust dem."

"I know. They'll want us to trust them for supplies so they can go up and trap more furs for Joe Moon, and we lose our money. They don't mean to do it, but once Joe Moon heaves in sight with his booze they forget us altogether."

"An' if you not give dem Injuns debt next fall, what can dey do? Dey jus' move away somewhere else and you get no trade at all."

"He gets us coming and going."

"Bot' ways."

Truly, Joe Moon held the upper hand. The full realization of this was beginning to dawn upon the factor. Through no fault of his own, he was being slowly and inevitably brought face to face with defeat, all by an enemy he had never seen, an enemy whom, it appeared, he could not fight.

"What can we do about it, Zotique?"

The French Canadian shrugged his shoulders. The factor's problems were not his. It was not for him to suggest or advise. He was sorry for Munroe, for he had a shrewd inkling of the consequences to the factor should the season's trade fail again, but so far as he was concerned he could not see that there was anything else to do but sit tight and hope that the gods of the wilderness saw to it that Joe Moon happily froze to death some bitter night or otherwise met a swift and sudden doom which would automatically solve the problem.

Munroe did not expect a reply. He tapped the arm of the chair with his fingers and looked moodily at the ceiling, while Zotique puffed away at his pipe.

He seemed utterly helpless. Up in the fur country Joe Moon was making away with the pelts, spring and another failure at the post were drawing nearer, and all he could do was sit there and await the inevitable.

He wondered if he dared fight Joe Moon at his own game, go up the Missabi and buy from the Indians direct; he wondered if it would be of any use. For he could not stoop to the methods of Joe Moon, there could be no trading in liquor; he would have to rely on cash purchases.

Would it be worth the risk, he asked himself? For there would be risk. He would be dismissed from the service were it known that he deserted the post in midwinter, no matter how high his motives or how excellent his intentions. The company had always done business in the old way, maintaining the dignity of a buyer always in a known place. They had seen too many ambitious independent buyers start out to compete with them, and end up in failure. The Wakina factors stayed in their posts and let the Indians come to them.

Well, reflected Munroe, he would be dismissed in any case if he waited for spring to come and had to turn in another bad report. Anything would be better than merely waiting passively for that to happen. He could, at least, put up a fight for the trade.

"ZOTIQUE," he said. "I'm thinking of going up there and buying furs myself."

Zotique grunted, and shook his head.

"No good—onless you bring whisky *blanc.*"

"No, I won't give booze for their furs. I'd pay cash. Next to a bottle of liquor there's nothing like a roll of greenbacks, to an Indian. I know I won't be able to go very far up the river and at the best I won't get many furs if Joe Moon has been ahead of me, but it looks to be the only way out if I don't want to see that room out there as empty as Old Mother Hubbard's cupboard next spring."

He waved his hand toward the storage room at the back, and remembered how appallingly empty it had been the season before. Certainly, he didn't want that to happen again.

"I nevair hear of dis Madame Hubbard," replied Zotique. "But I don't t'ink you can do ver' much. Who mind store w'en you go 'way?"

He might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, Munroe decided.

"How would you like to mind it, Zotique?"

Zotique's eyes widened and he laughed.

"Me? Me mind store? Dat one big joke." He chuckled, appreciatively, at the idea.

"I mean it. There's nothing much doing around here in the winter. It isn't often any one comes around. Perhaps there won't be any one before I come back, but if there is, you can handle them."

Zotique had helped him in the store the previous trading season. He was an honest, slow-going old fellow, and shrewd. While he could not do a great deal of good at the post, at least he would do no harm. He could be relied upon to mind the place for a fortnight at least. For Munroe, after toying with the idea, had definitely decided to make a fortnight's journey up into the fur country, to attempt to salvage something from the wreck of the season's trade, and if the experiment proved successful he would go out again.

Zotique was pleased. The thought of minding the Wakina post, all alone, was attractive.

"Well," he said, "if you t'ink I can. I do anyt'ing you tol' me. You won't be away ver' long, no?"

"Only a couple of weeks. I'm going to try it anyway, Zotique. I'm hanged if I'm going to sit here and twiddle my thumbs all winter and let Joe Moon beat me. I'm going to give him a fight."

He got up from his chair and walked briskly out to the little kitchen at the back.

"You go right now?" asked Zotique in astonishment. This young fellow Munroe wasted no time.

"Not right away," laughed the factor. "First thing in the morning, though. I'm going to pack up some grub and things, and if I don't come back here with some furs my name isn't Munroe. And if I meet this fellow Joe Moon I'll tell him a few things."

Therein lay much of Munroe's real desire to get up into the fur country. He wanted to meet Joe Moon. He wanted to come to grips with this man who was ruining his fur trade; he did not like the idea of sitting placidly in Wakina all winter long while Joe Moon busied himself with his nefarious traffic in the wilds. He wanted Joe Moon to know that he was fighting back, that he was not going to take his defeat lying down.

He opened a pack sack upon the table and commenced to prepare for his journey. Cold moose meat, tea, sugar, bannock flour; he would not need a great deal of food for he would be among the Indians, but it would be as well to go prepared. Deftly he packed the things he would need, arranging them with an economy of space which showed that he was no neophyte of the trails.

"Dat Joe Moon, he pretty big feller," observed Zotique, coming into the kitchen to watch the preparations. "He, w'at you say?—tough guy."

"I don't care how tough he is. I'm not

going to let him walk away with all the furs in the Missabi without putting up a scrap for them."

Zotique looked dubious. He glanced at the tall, sinewy young man who was busying himself with the packing, and he told himself that there was excitement in store for Joe Moon. Although, truly, Joe Moon was a terrible man.

"Some fellow tol' me Joe Moon nearly kill one fur buyer las' winter," he said. "Fur buyer was try to trade wit' de Injuns too, an' Joe Moon shoot him. He mos' die. You bettair take a gun."

"Oh, I'm taking a gun all right, but there'll be no shooting. If I meet Joe Moon I'll tell him what I think of him and give him a good licking. If I don't meet him I'll try to get all the furs I can anyway."

"He ver' bad man."

"Say, Zotique," said Munroe, pausing to look at the old man. "Are you trying to scare me?"

"No—I not try scare you. But you be ver' careful wit' Joe Moon. I know. I hear 'bout him often."

"Oh, I'll be careful, all right. Joe Moon will run when he sees me coming," Munroe laughed.

Brave words, these. Zotique watched Munroe as he carefully bundled up a sleeping bag. The old French Canadian felt a slight quaver of apprehension. These young fellows are so confident. And Joe Moon was a "tough guy."

II

THE kitchen window was a black mirror reflecting the yellow lamplight as Hugh Munroe moved about next morning in final preparation for his journey north of Wakina. It was not quite dawn; the wind was moaning about the trading post; the shop out in front was in darkness save for a straggling peninsula of lamplight beyond the doorway; the stove was crackling in a dull way, but the little kitchen was very cold.

Munroe's bunk, with the blankets turned back, looked very inviting, and, as he moved about his tasks, he tried to shake off a great depression. There is a chill which comes with the hours approaching dawn of a winter morning, a chill more bitter, more penetrating than any other, a chill which not only permeates the body but the soul, disillusioning, disenheartening, discouraging.

The small hours before winter daylight cast a blight upon the hopes and ambitions of any man who stirs to activity at that time; for then, all endeavors seem futile, all desires empty, all achievements worthless. Was it worth while, after all, he wondered, to try to fight Joe Moon? Would it not be better to give in, when the odds were so hopeless, instead of making this quixotic attempt, which would only intensify the bitterness of defeat?

Zotique Larose was snoring amid his blankets at the other end of the room. There was no long journey out into the darkness for him; and if he wished, Hugh Munroe could go back to his bunk and sleep as well. But there is an instinct in youth against the line of least resistance, an instinct toward the harder course and, although now all Munroe's vainglorious desires to hasten down the river trail and give battle to Joe Moon, appeared strangely useless and futile in this cold, dark morning, he opened the door and lugged out his packsack and sleeping bag, piling them on the toboggan, with a dogged determination to go through with his plan, no matter how empty it now appeared.

He returned to the kitchen to find the kettle boiling, and he had breakfast, frying bacon and dipping bread in the hot grease, drinking strong tea, while the blackness of the window behind him mingled almost imperceptibly with a sullen gray and the lamplight grew weaker and the shadows melted. Faint light gradually diffused the gloom of the shop, out in front, where the long windows shyly emerged to view and took on shape.

It was dawn when Munroe finished his meal. He went out into the shop and over to the little safe behind the counter, twiddling mechanically at the combination until he finally pulled the door open. He took out a bundle of bills he had counted out the evening before, a thousand dollars in all, and stuffed them securely in his money belt, then locked the safe again and returned to the kitchen.

The money would be more than ample for the length of his trip, but it was best to be on the safe side; he might have better luck than he expected. He put on his mackinaw and fur cap and pulled on his heavy mittens. Then, with a final glance at the sleeping Larose, he blew out the lamp and strode out of the kitchen into the snow.

There were a few wan stars overhead as he crossed over to the stable and the dogs greeted him, snarling, but he led them out and hitched them to the toboggan. A great stretch of snow merged with a scattering of woods on the dark horizon, far away, bleak and uninviting, and the wide valley of the river extended in irregular curves and twistings into an infinite gloom. A well beaten path led down to the river trail and Munroe turned to it, urging the dogs and, after ineffectual growlings, they bowed to the trail and were away.

Down on the frozen river, where the snow was hard and firm, and the trail led away between the white, winding banks, they settled to their task and sped northward.

The trading post became hidden from view. Dawn gave way to daylight, and the shrouded forms of burnt trees stood out, clear and distinct, along the sloping river borders. A fire had passed across there two seasons before and in the summer those banks were black tangles of desolation but now the snow hid the ruin.

The river trail unfolded before them as they passed projecting points and, here and there, came upon little islands jutting suddenly out of the surrounding whiteness. They had struck a steady, even pace and, when finally the morning wore on and the sun struggled from behind a tattered cloud, Munroe became aglow; the cold was more of an external thing now, that hour of darkness before the beginning of the journey seemed years and years ago; he felt warm and vigorous, and confidence returned to him.

"Moosh!" he cried to his dogs, not that they were lagging, but because the sound of his voice relieved the tension of the loneliness, and he hummed lines of a trail song as they coursed toward the everbeckoning river bends, toward new vistas of the frozen river, with its snow-covered slopes and illimitable stretches of trees ranging high on either side to receding silhouettes against the sky. For they had left the burnt lands behind.

When the sun was overhead he halted by a pine-covered point and let the dogs rest, while he ate his lunch of bread and cold moose meat, after which he smoked a pipe, then shouted to his dogs again and once more plunged into the white silence.

He had long been accustomed to the north, but never had he been able to rid himself of an unfathomable awe in the spectacle of the sweeping reaches of the snows, so inscrutable, so magnificently imbued with a sense of power—where a human being was so small and so impotent that there was something humorous in the mere thought of a man pitting his puny strength against this wilderness.

It was a wilderness with all the magic inconsistency of the sea, and there was a fascination about it for, while it could be kind, it was always stern and often ruthless. It was a wilderness prodigal in its gifts to the bold, yet it played no favorites, and could unleash consuming furies to destroy strong man and weakling alike.

There was a life for a man! To gamble with the wilderness for her favors, to risk the impartial doom of her smiting blizzards, her griping cold, her terrific solitudes. He could understand now why men returned again and again to this feverish game, prospectors, trappers, fur traders, succumbing to the fascination. He even had some admiration for Joe Moon, who took the risks of the wilderness, but there was more of contempt, for Joe Moon was moved by greed, and did not gamble fairly.

So ran his thoughts as he followed the river trail, and it was with surprize that finally he saw the river widen out and noticed that the pines along the river banks were giving away to a growth of spruce, which indicated that he was near Spruce Lake where lived that Indian, Mike, who had sold his furs to Joe Moon for two bottles of liquor.

IT WAS midafternoon. He had not anticipated reaching the Indian's shack before nightfall, and he was elated at having made such good time. They emerged on to the small lake and the dogs, sighting the cabin on the opposite shore, increased their speed. In a few minutes they had reached the footpath leading up to the shack and Munroe, leaving his toboggan, walked up the slope while the Indian himself emerged from his shack to greet him.

" 'Lo," said the Indian, whom some humorous factor, years before, had dubbed Michael Angelo, which sobriquet had been shortened to "Mike," and by which name the redskin had been known among the white men ever since.

He was a fat, sleepy looking Indian, and his nondescript garb of store trousers, moccasins and tattered sweater, would have been surprizing to any one expecting the buckskin accouterments of the movie red man. He grinned broadly as he recognized the factor.

"Good day, Mike," greeted Munroe, in Siwash, a dialect wherein the Indian and the white man met half way on the unsteady bridge of conversation. "Just came up to pay you a little visit."

If the Indian was surprized at seeing Munroe away from Wakina at this time of year he gave no sign of it but merely waited, expectantly, to learn the purpose of his call.

"How much fur have you?"

The face of Michael Angelo became overshadowed with a great sadness and he at once became properly ashamed of himself.

"Zotique ask me. I tell him: Joe Moon."

"Haven't you any left at all? Haven't you been out on your lines since Joe Moon was here?"

The Indian went into his shack and Munroe followed. Although it was small and dirty, Mike was immensely proud of his abode, for he had built it in a good season some years ago. There was a real stove, battered and ancient, but nevertheless a stove, and a window, with real glass. The cabin was well made, of cedar logs brought from a swamp some distance away, and Mike had fashioned an excellent door, with wooden hinges.

But Munroe was not there to admire. Mike took a few furs from the wall and handed them to him. There were two beaver, one marten and some muskrat, all of which the Indian had accumulated since Joe Moon's last visit and, while Munroe had expected it, his heart sank as he looked at the furs.

"All right," he told Mike. "I'll take them. They'll go on your debt."

He wasted no time, but bundled up the furs and made a note of the amount in a small notebook he carried, checking it off against the figure of Mike's debt to the company, for he had prepared himself beforehand with this information. Mike looked very solemn; the whole process savored strongly of giving his furs away altogether. With Joe Moon he at least got some liquor.

"If you hadn't traded all your furs to Joe Moon for whisky *blanc* you might have had your debt cleared up by now," said Munroe, to emphasize the lesson. "You know you shouldn't drink, Mike. That's why you have so few furs for me now, and if you deal with Joe Moon any more you won't have any at all when you come to Wakina."

He turned to leave the cabin.

"Where you going now?" asked Mike.

"Down the river. See some more Indians."

"Joe Moon there," said the Indian, impassively.

"What of it?"

Mike shrugged his shoulders.

"He no like. Joe Moon bad man."

Munroe laughed.

"He can't frighten me. I want to meet him."

Mike grunted a few words in his own tongue, in which Munroe could distinguish some good advice to go back to Wakina and avoid certain death farther on, but he merely grinned cheerfully and left the cabin with the furs, waved good-by to the Indian, who watched him from the doorway, and went back down to his toboggan.

"Away we go again," he said to his dogs, as he flung down the little bundle of furs, and they turned again toward the river trail.

Spruce Lake disappeared behind and, after he had journeyed for some time, there came a faint glow behind the river bank, which told him that the sun had set. A chill wind swept down the Missabi. Darkness comes quickly in midwinter out in the open, but he made good time, and, when finally he saw a twinkling of light far ahead, he was able to distinguish the outlines of the cabin from which it emanated and he knew he was approaching the cabin of Louis Buckshot.

His dealing with Mike had been no more successful than he had anticipated, but Louis Buckshot was a cautious old halfbreed, of whom he had higher hopes. He was a good trapper, he always brought in a big catch, and the previous year he had been among the very few who had resisted the temptation of Joe Moon's liquor. Munroe had hopes that he might have proved as adamant again this season. If Louis Buckshot had a good supply of furs on hand his journey would be worthwhile even if he failed elsewhere.

The darkness grew deeper, and when he finally drove up to Louis Buckshot's cabin, night had fallen. The half-breed opened the door when he heard the dogs, and stood there, peering out in surprize, for visitors were few in the winter time.

"HULLO, Louis," shouted Munroe. "It's only me! How about a meal and bed for a tired man?"

The half-breed came out and, recognizing him, grunted a welcome and bent to help Munroe unhitch the dogs. The latter leaped from the harness and showed no disposition to be herded into a small lean-to behind the shack, but the factor snapped his whip over them and spoke sharply, and they finally obeyed. Louis brought out some fish and threw it to the animals. Then Munroe followed him into the shack, while the dogs fought over their meal.

It was a dark, untidy little hovel, and the only light was from an open fire in the center, a hole in the roof disposing of the smoke, and Louis Buckshot's squaw, a massive, ungainly parody of a woman, was bending over a bubbling pot, whence rose an odor of stewing beaver meat. This odor served in some measure to counteract the general foulness of the place but Munroe, although not squeamish, had an impulse to hold his breath as he entered.

Louis Buckshot said nothing, but indicated a soap box upon which Munroe might sit, and himself retired to a bunk in the shadows, where he reclined to contemplate his visitor. Two children peeped out from under the bunk, like shy animals, and another stared solemnly at Munroe from behind a pile of furs in a corner. The squaw, after looking around without show of interest, resumed her duties at the fire.

"You eat?" invited Louis, finally.

He spoke to the woman, who filled a tin pannikin with beaver stew, and handed it to Munroe. Louis took a pannikin himself, the woman produced spoons with great pride, the children emerged from their hiding places and soon all were eating, none with more gusto than their visitor. Munroe, who was hungry after his long journey, took two helpings of the stew and complimented Louis Buckshot, who smiled with satisfaction, as if he had been personally responsible for its excellence.

They washed down the meal with snow water, and then the factor produced his tobacco pouch. Louis Buckshot's eyes lighted up, he moved over and sat down on the floor, gravely accepted tobacco, and they smoked. The squaw bundled the children to bed and retired to the background. The men could now talk business.

"Got any fur, Louis?"

"Some."

"Was Joe Moon here?"

"Him here," replied Louis, in broken English. "Me no trade."

"That's good. I'm buying furs now. Show me what you have."

The half-breed betrayed no surprize, but grunted a command to his squaw, who moved about the shack, gathering the furs, which she placed in a great heap between the two men.

Munroe's eyes brightened. This was better luck. There was a goodly quantity of beaver, some marten and fisher, a few skunk, three fox, among them a black fox skin of surpassing beauty and worth much, and even a wolverine, as well as furs of minor value. The furs made an imposing heap before him and he strove to appear matter-of-fact.

He inspected the furs and rated their value at current prices, figured for a moment in his note-book and then said:

"These furs clear up your debt, Louis. I give you one hundred dollars besides."

Now Louis Buckshot had one idiosyncrasy. He did not like paper money. Gold coins, silver coins, articles of trade in the way of blankets and tea and mouth-organs, were all as one to him, but he had a deep-rooted suspicion of paper money. Other Indians and half-breeds took to it quickly enough, but there was a streak of obstinacy in his nature which made him slow in accepting it as part of the scheme of things.

At the trading post he had simply turned in his furs, taken such articles as he desired until the factor told him his credit was gone, taken out new supplies in the fall on credit, and seldom saw money at all. And now, when Munroe felt in his belt and produced a roll of bills, counting out a hundred dollars in tens, he shook his head.

He didn't want any of the white man's money. He was eyeing Munroe's rifle, leaning in a corner. His own rifle was old. Would Munroe give him the rifle for his furs? Munroe would not. He held the money before the half-breed's face but it aroused no emotion. It was merely a handful of paper to him. Some one had once told him that paper money was often bad, that sometimes the trading stores wouldn't accept it, and this had stuck in his memory. Munroe explained how he could buy many things with the money when he came down to the trading post in the spring. Louis Buckshot shook his head.

"No like," he said, doggedly.

Munroe was desperate. He had to have those furs. He became even more persuasive. He took out two dollar bills and added them to the bundle of money, and this proved too great for further resistance. Louis Buckshot consented to take the money in his hand, held it up to the light, and at last agreed that the deal was closed.

For all his dislike for paper money, he was shrewd enough to know that he had made a better deal than if he had brought the furs to Wakina in the spring. He wondered at Munroe's coming up at this time of year, but it was none of his business.

Munroe sealed the bargain with tobacco, and then tied up the furs in a great bundle with those he had received from the Indian at Spruce Lake. Thus far, his trip had been more successful than he had hoped.

"I leave furs here," he said to Louis Buckshot.

The furs made a heavy pack and he wished to travel as lightly as possible in the event of making equally heavy purchases farther north. He could not afford to have too heavy a pack on the return journey. Louis Buckshot nodded, so he put the furs carefully away in a corner and then unrolled his sleeping bag.

"I go on again in the morning," he told the half-breed, as he took off his moccasins.

To his surprize, Louis Buckshot shook his head.

"Joe Moon up river," he said.

"Joe Moon—Joe Moon—Joe Moon," declared Munroe. "Every place I go I'm warned about Joe Moon."

"You no go."

"Why shouldn't I go?"

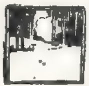
"Joe Moon, bad man. He kill you."

"Don't worry. He won't kill me, Louis."

"Mebbe," said the half-breed, going over to his bunk. "You meet Joe Moon tomorrow. He not far. I know. You go back Wakina."

The half-breed was very earnest, but Munroe passed his words over with a smile. This Joe Moon had evidently built up a fearful reputation. He would meet him tomorrow, Louis Buckshot said. Well, the sooner the better. He crawled into his sleeping bag.

III



MUNROE was on the trail again shortly after dawn next day, and by midafternoon he had visited two other Indians, but with indifferent success. The first had not visited his traplines since Joe Moon's last visit, in fact he had been very sick, from the effects of the rot-gut he had drunk, and he had no furs at all. The other Indian had a few furs of poor quality and these Munroe bought.

"Joe Moon down river," he told Munroe, as the factor was leaving the shack.

"How far?"

"Nogassaw men. Joe Moon there since one day. Everybody drunk now. You not go."

Munroe knew what he meant by "Nogassaw men." Joe Moon was at a small Indian village a few miles down the river, where camped old Peter Nogassaw, his sons and their families. Peter Nogassaw was one of the oldest redskins in the Missabi region, and he enjoyed a miniature chieftainship of this family community.

There would be plenty of furs there, for their traplines radiated from the village like the spokes of a wheel, and old Peter saw to it that his sons worked hard all winter long; but if Joe Moon had reached the village before him there was little chance that any furs would be left by now. And if what the Indian told him were true, and they were all drunk by now, there would be trouble among the Nogassaw men.

It is a truism that when an Indian becomes drunk he again becomes a savage. Any acquired traits of character drop from him as a garment; he is crazed, dangerous, and when other Indians become drunk with him they are as animals. In which, of course, they differ not greatly from some white men. But when liquor enters an Indian village, bonds of blood and friendship are broken. Munroe knew that the previous season an Indian youth had brained his grandmother with an axe, and that another had shot his own brother during one of these orgies. There would be trouble among the Nogassaw men, and even danger, but that only lent an added spice to the journey.

"And why shouldn't I go?" he asked, smiling.

The Indian frowned.

"They fight. Mebbe not like you. Mebbe Joe Moon there yet."

"That's just why I'm going," replied Munroe, turning to his dogs. The old Indian shrugged his shoulders doubtfully. It was not his affair. The white man was very foolish. He returned to his shack and Munroe again took the river trail.

It was evening before he approached the Nogassaw village. Darkness had fallen, and the black mass of pines along each river bank seemed to close in upon him. There was no moon, there were no stars in the sky, and he feared a storm, but the snow gave off a certain radiance which enabled him to keep to the trail without difficulty, and finally he saw a faint glow far down the river ahead of him, and he knew he was nearing the village of the Nogassaw men.

As he drew closer, the shacks were silhouetted against this red glow, which was from a bonfire, and he could hear shouts, so he knew then that Joe Moon had indeed been in the village and but recently, and that a celebration was in progress.

Despite the fact that it was a bitterly cold night, all the Nogassaw men appeared to be out of doors, and when Munroe drove his dogs up the path from the river he could hear a confused uproar, the screams of a woman, the bawling of children, and hoarse yells of men. Figures were lurching unsteadily to and fro about a bonfire in front of the log huts, and he drove up to the circle of firelight and surveyed the scene. His approach was unnoticed, save by some Indian dogs who set up a tremendous yelping from a small stockade in the background but it was unobserved in the general racket.

Two Indians were rolling in the snow, grunting heavily as they fought, punching and pommeling each other, while an old man, Peter Nogassaw himself, laughed senilely and belabored them with a stick. Three others were watching the fight, arguing drunkenly, and a little over to one side, three others were engaging in preliminaries to another hand to hand battle.

From one of the shacks came the screams of the woman and, as Munroe watched, an Indian staggered out the doorway, a dog-whip in his hand, having presumably beaten his squaw to his entire satisfaction.

There was an indescribable uproar, and it was intensified by the yelling of the children in the other huts. The bonfire roared and crackled, and cast flickering shadows, so that the whole scene had an eerie effect of unreality, like some passing fragment of a nightmare. The Indians were drunk, maudlin, irresponsible, and lurched about in the firelight like evil phantoms of the inferno.

This was Joe Moon's work. Munroe felt a raging resentment against the trader, not because he knew now that he would get no furs from the Nogassaw men, but because Joe Moon had given them the liquor which had reduced them to this state. There was no humor in the spectacle, as there sometimes is in the antics of white men under such conditions; he felt no contempt for the redskins, only pity. For he knew the Indians, and they were like children, shy, quiet and docile children of the wilderness; but now they were savage, inflamed with liquor, and all the repressed savagery of generations was seething to the surface.

As he watched, the three Inidans who had been arguing over to one side, became aware of his presence, and they came over unsteadily toward him. He recognized them, for they had been at Wakina the previous summer, and nodded in greeting.

"Why you come?" asked one, roughly.

"For furs," Munroe replied shortly, well knowing what the answer would be. "You got furs?"

The Indians looked stupidly at him and shook their heads.

"Joe Moon here," said one sullenly.

"Has Joe Moon got your furs?"

They looked away from him.

"You go 'way," said the spokesman, gazing over toward one of the shacks. "Joe Moon not gone."

So the trader was still in the village. Munroe felt a quickening sense of anticipation, as he realized that he would soon meet his enemy, and he spoke to the Indians again.

"Tell Joe Moon I want to see him."

The Indians looked at one another, frightened.

"No. You go 'way."

"Not until I see Joe Moon," replied Munroe. "Show me where he is."

"Who speaks of Joe Moon?"

It was a deep booming voice, close at hand, and when they heard it, the Indians turned swiftly and then shrank back toward the fire. A man strode out of the doorway of one of the shacks near by.

* * *

HE WAS very tall and broad, and in his great mackinaw, with a massive fur cap upon his head, the effect of his great bulk was heightened and in the flickering light he appeared a veritable giant, towering above all others there. He was clad for the trail, and he was pulling on his fur mittens as he came out of the hut and came over to Munroe.

He was heavy and powerful, and he walked with a slight hunch of his great shoulders, as if his immense size were a burden; and this giant had a visage of singular ferocity, his narrow eyes squinted from under heavy, black brows; he had not shaved for a long while and his black stubble of beard increased the ugliness of his appearance. He seemed to emanate a sense of strength and ruthless power, and there was cruelty in the hard lines of his face.

He came over to Munroe and placed himself directly in front of the factor, gazing at him with sudden suspicion, and then he laughed harshly.

"The factor, eh? From Wakina. You're a long way from home, young fellow. What brings you here?"

"That's my business," snapped Munroe.

The big man looked at him impassively.

"You were speaking of Joe Moon. That's my name."

"You caused this," said Munroe, evenly, motioning toward the drunken Indians, who were still fighting and shouting, oblivious to the meeting.

"You say so."

"I know it. You make them drunk and then take their furs."

"And what of it?" The trader's voice was metallic.

"Is that fair? Is that fair to the Indians, or to the trading posts?"

Joe Moon bared his uneven teeth as he shoved his shaggy head forward.

"Youngster," he said, "if it was worth my time I'd break every bone in your body. But you're only a sorehead factor. You're sore because I'm grabbing off the furs you think should come to you. I'm not even going to bother fighting with you."

And with this, he turned his back on Munroe, leaving the young man feeling somewhat foolish. But if Joe Moon had counted on the factor losing his temper and leaping at him in a frenzy of rage, he was mistaken, for something told Munroe that he was dealing with a dangerous man and that Joe Moon was by no means through with him.

He watched the giant trader walk over to the shadows behind one of the huts and return a moment later, leading his dogs. They were drawing a sled, piled high with bundles, and the factor knew that these bundles were the furs Joe Moon had just received from the Nogassaw men.

"See," said Joe Moon, pointing at the sled with his dog whip. "I have more furs right here than you'll get if you roam through this country all winter. Stay in Wakina beside the stove, youngster. This is a man's game."

"Not the way you play it."

"It doesn't matter how I play it," retorted Joe Moon. "I get the furs. You don't. That's all that counts."

He straightened out a few of the bundles on the sled, fumbled with the harness for a moment, then straightened up.

"And now, young fellow," he said, his voice very low and harsh. "I'm going to leave you something to remember me by."

So suddenly that Munroe scarcely saw the swift motion of his arm, he raised the dog whip and swung viciously, the lash cutting the factor's face like a red hot iron. The blinding pain of it left Munroe dazed for a moment and then, through a red mist, he saw Joe Moon, laughing cruelly, swing the whip for another blow, and once more the lash cut a livid weal.

He charged at the trader in blind fury and swung for Joe Moon's face, but his fist merely grazed Joe Moon's shoulder for he stepped to one side, quickly reversing the dog whip as he did, and the heavy handle of the whip, loaded with shot, smashed across Munroe's forehead. The blow was terriffic and the factor staggered and then Joe Moon slugged at him again with the whip handle, a crashing, stunning blow, and he reeled and fell, deprived of all consciousness, sinking into a welter of hot blackness.

There was a wild shouting among the

Indians, who staggered over and gabbled gutturally among themselves, for few had noticed the incidents leading up to the clash. Joe Moon, his face savage, stood above the recumbent form of Munroe in the snow. He still clenched the dog whip in his hand, and he glared at the Indians in the firelight.

"Take him away," he ordered, kicking the factor as he stepped aside. The Indians made not a move, but huddled drunkenly in the fire glow.

"Take him away, I tell you," he repeated sharply. "Put him in one of the shacks."

One of the Indians lurched forward and laid hold of Munroe. The factor was quite unconscious. The redskin half dragged, half carried him over to the dark entrance of one of the huts.

"That'll teach him," muttered Joe Moon, as he turned to his sled.

He caught sight of Munroe's toboggan, some distance away, the dogs lying in their harness in the snow, and he went over to it. The dogs leaped up, snarling, but he lashed about him with the whip and they cowered.

"Not many furs," he said to himself, as he inspected the toboggan and saw the few pelts Munroe had secured from the last Indian he had visited.

So the factor was trading with the Indians direct!

With a sudden suspicion, he looked over the packs, but found no liquor, and he laughed in contempt for the young fool who would attempt such opposition without bringing liquor for the Indians. But how was he dealing? There were no trading goods on the toboggan. Money? That was it.

He left the toboggan and went over to the shack where Munroe was now lying and, pushing open the door, entered the dark interior. He could hear the factor groaning upon a bunk in the corner and he went over to him. Joe Moon grasped him roughly and felt for his belt, then found what he was seeking—money. Plenty of it. He took out the bills, thumbed them over in the darkness and then went through Munroe's pockets to make sure he had not more. Well, Munroe would do no more trading this trip and Joe Moon was two or three hundred dollars to the good. Perhaps more, for he could not see the bills.

Without money, Munroe would have to return to Wakina. He would get no furs from the men of Nogassaw, and he would certainly be unable to go farther north. Munroe's trading expedition was over. And, after the reception he had been given, Joe Moon reflected that it would be a long time before any factor ventured forth from Wakina to obstruct him.

Good humor returning to him, he returned to his sled, piled high with furs. The matter of the money caused him some slight uneasiness. Munroe might complain to the Mounted Police. Well, let him. He had no evidence. The Indians would be equally open to suspicion of robbing him as he lay unconscious.

He called old Peter Nogassaw over to him and spoke to him.

"See that the white man is kept in the shack. He is asleep. If he wakes up do not let him go away. He may want to follow me. Keep him in the village until morning."

Old Peter promised.

The Indians had returned to their drinking and were again arguing and fighting about the fire, as if there had been no interruption whatever. One of them was dragging a small boy out of a near-by shack and was kicking him, a parental privilege which aroused not even a casual glance from the others, although the youngster squealed unmercifully.

"Noisy hounds," grunted Joe Moon to himself, and then, shouting to his dogs, he sped out of the circle of firelight into the snowy darkness, up the river trail.

IV

THROUGH a confusion of aching darkness, Munroe gradually regained his senses, but he lay on the crude bunk for a long while. His head ached fiercely and a consuming lethargy possessed him. He tried to remember the details of his encounter with Joe Moon and he was overcome with a dull sense of defeat. He groaned involuntarily and tried to struggle to a sitting posture.

There was a rustling in the darkness as he moved, and then a whisper.

"White man—hurt?"

It was in the dialect, and he peered through the gloom but could only distinguish a vague form near by. It had been a woman's voice—one of the squaws.

"Not bad. What happened?" he said.

"Joe Moon," she whispered.

Joe Moon! At every turn he heard the name of the rascally trader, always spoken in that same tone of fearful respect.

"He hit you."

"Did Joe Moon go away?"

"He go."

So the trader had left the Nogassaw village. Well, reflected Munroe, he would go out and see to his dogs and then be on his way in the morning. The Indians would not refuse him shelter for the night, in spite of their drunken state. He and Joe Moon would meet again.

Painfully he got up and went over to the door, feeling about for the crude latch. But the woman whispered again.

"Stay," she said. "They hurt you."

He could hear the loud voices of the Indians outside, but he laughed shortly. The squaw had reason to be afraid of them, no doubt, but he did not. He shoved open the door and stepped outside.

The Indians were still continuing their carouse, but their numbers had diminished, some having staggered into the huts for drunken slumber, but those who remained were still quarreling about the fire; two were wrangling about the slight remaining contents of a bottle. As Munroe stood there for a moment, looking at them, one caught sight of him and spoke quickly to the others. They all turned and stared soddenly at the factor, then advanced unsteadily toward him.

"Back," ordered one, pointing at the door behind him.

"Where did Joe Moon go?"

They shook their heads obstinately, and crowded about him, five in number, old Peter Nogassaw gabbling rapidly in Ojibway. Munroe gathered that he was ordering him to go back into the shack but he stepped ahead and, as he did so, one of the other Indians snatched out a knife, and confronted him, his eyes glinting dangerously. The redskin was very drunk, but the knife was very bright and sharp, so Munroe told himself he must be careful.

"I stay here tonight," he said.

The old Indian, Peter, nodded vigorously and then motioned to the shack again.

"I feed my dogs," went on Munroe quietly.

"No," grunted old Peter. "You stay."

The man with the knife came closer and one of the others lifted a heavy stick, and together they shoved him back to the doorway.

Munroe was minded to oppose them, but he was outnumbered and they were recklessly drunk, so he made a pretense of agreement and stepped abruptly back into the shack again. He could hear them talking when he went inside and then one man sat down heavily against the door, plainly as a guard. He was a prisoner.

He went back to the bunk and sat down. He intended to remain in the village overnight anyway, so there was no use making trouble for himself, and he could easily get away in the morning. But he fretted about his dogs, for they had not been fed; perhaps the Indians would look after them.

Then the woman whispered again.

"Joe Moon go. Take money."

For a moment, Munroe did not understand. Take money? Then, on sudden thought, he felt quickly for his belt. It was empty. The big roll of bills had disappeared.

This was serious. Joe Moon's purpose was plain. Without money, Munroe would be forced to turn back to Wakina, abandon his trip altogether. He was beaten. Joe Moon had won a complete victory—this time.

"Which way did Joe Moon go?" he whispered.

"Up river."

"Up?"

"Take same trail you come."

This was a new angle. He had assumed that Joe Moon would cut across country from the village, toward the railway. And then he remembered that the trader had not been successful with Louis Buckshot on his previous visit. Perhaps he was making a second attempt.

With this thought, Munroe was galvanized to action. He would have to return by the river trail in any case, for Joe Moon had seen to it that he was unable to proceed farther. Plainly, the trader had ordered the Indians to detain Munroe in order that he might not be inconveniently close on his trail, counting on a good twelve hours' start in all probability.

But why not outguess Joe Moon and overtake him? Munroe's head still pained him and he had a lively desire to meet Joe Moon again. His enemy had not only clubbed him senseless but had robbed him, destroying his chances of further trading and effectually crushing Munroe's hopes of salvaging something from the wreck of the winter's fur trade.

He peeped out through a cranny of the door and saw that the guard had fallen over in the snow, fast asleep. The squaw crept close behind him as he watched. Then he could see her loom darkly beside him and he pointed to the sleeping guard.

"He'll freeze," he explained. "I go now. You bring him in."

She whispered assent and, very quietly, he opened the door again, inch by inch, and looked out. The bonfire had been neglected and had died down so that the immediate circle of light was small in scope. The Indians were continuing their interminable wrangling and were not looking his way, so he crept cautiously out into the snow. He was unobserved.

There was a small patch of light between the doorway and the inviting shadow of the trees, but he slipped across it like a ghost, and then went over to his toboggan. It was where he had left it, and the dogs were lying in their harness.

He looked back toward the fire. The dark shapes were still there in the semicircle of the huts, and their voices sounded gruff and maudlin. He reached cautiously down and grasped the collar of the lead dog.

As he did so, the others leaped up, yelping. At the noise, the Indians beyond the fire, turned and saw him.

"Ho," shouted one, and then the Indians staggered over toward him. Munroe turned the lead dog toward the trail to the river, and spoke to him, sharply.

There was a clamor of shouting behind him.

"Moosh!"

He flung himself flat upon the toboggan and, as he did so, a heavy stick whirled past him and was buried in the snow. The dogs rushed down the path and then a knife clattered on to the toboggan, missing him by a few inches. The toboggan swayed from side to side, and he had a confused impression of dark figures in the fire glow, as he looked behind, the Indians jabbering excitedly. Then the Nogassaw village was obliterated by the tall pine trees and he was speeding swiftly and silently over the snow of the river trail.

IT was very cold, but there was no wind. A canopy of black sky descended into the diminishing grayness of the white expanse of river before him.

Somewhere out in that great darkness was Joe Moon, doubtless far ahead by now, but Joe Moon was at a certain disadvantage. He did not know that Munroe was in pursuit. And it was a grim, dogged pursuit, for he was determined to follow Joe Moon if the chase led him to the railway. He had forgotten the cold, he had forgotten that he was tired and hungry and that his head still ached from the pain of those blows the trader had dealt him—he had forgotten all that in the thrill of being hot on the trail of his enemy.

For over an hour the toboggan sped over the snow, but then Munroe noticed that his dogs were lagging. They had been on the trail all day and had not been fed. One of them was whining a bit, but in his eagerness he snapped the whip over their heads and, for a while, they regained the old pace, but at last they began to falter again.

He realized that, no matter how ready he was to travel all night in pursuit, he could not disregard his dogs. So, grudging the loss of time, he let them stop. He loosened the harness and, taking frozen fish from one of his packs, fed them. They wolfed the meal and promptly curled up in the snow to sleep, so Munroe unrolled his sleeping bag and did likewise.

It was still dark when he wakened. He did not think he had lost a great deal of time. If the trader had planned to visit Louis Buckshot again he could do no trade until daytime. So Munroe clambered out of his sleeping bag, ate a cold breakfast, hitched up the dogs again and once more took the trail.

Darkness gave way to the gray light of approaching dawn as he resumed the pursuit. The sky over the tree-tops was like slate, unbroken, ominous. There was only a faint illumination to mark the appearance of the sun, and the eternal silence of the wilderness seemed heavy and intense, as if invisible forces of peril were gathering.

As Munroe noted the sullen dullness of the dawn he frowned, for it was evident that a storm was rising. But it was still a long way off, for there was no wind, there were no telltale wraiths of snow scurrying across the frozen surface of the river, and he urged on his dogs. Joe Moon might even now be at Louis Buckshot's cabin, might even delay there for fear of the approaching blizzard, thinking that Munroe would be similarly held back at the Nogassaw village.

He recognized landmarks along the river banks which told him when he was nearing Louis Buckshot's place and finally, when the dogs went around a jutting headland, he saw the ungainly cabin, bleak against the hillside snow. Smoke was curling above the roof.

A tingling excitement possessed him as he thought that Joe Moon might even then be in the shack and, as his dogs toiled up the hill and halted, panting, before the door, he resolved that the trader would have no chance to take him by surprize again.

The cabin was silent as he strode over to the door, but he pounded for admittance.

There was no answer. He pounded vigorously again. He could hear the fire crackling within. Some one must be around. He shoved open the door and stepped inside.

Two long, sinewy arms twined themselves suddenly around him as a heavy form leaped at him from beside the doorway, and he was flung violently forward, on the floor of the shack. A knee was dug into the small of his back and, although he struggled desperately, he was powerless, for his assailant had grasped both his arms and was twisting them behind his back so that any movement was fraught with exquisite pain.

He felt something slip tightly over his wrists, fingers fumbled swiftly and then he felt his wrists bound securely together, whereupon his attacker arose, turned him about like a sack of flour and he found himself sitting up, his back against the wall, his wrists tied behind him.

All this time there had been the one thought in his mind. It was Joe Moon who had waited for him and thus cleverly entrapped him, and he condemned himself for his lack of caution. But when he looked up he saw, not the ugly, unshaven visage of the trader, but the brown, immobile features of Louis Buckshot.

The half-breed was breathing heavily from his exertions—for although Munroe had been taken completely by surprize he had struggled with vigor—sat down upon the floor and contemplated him morosely. His wife and the children looked on, frightened and silent, from a corner.

"Well, Louis," observed Munroe, finally, taking in the situation, but bewildered by the unexpected nature of the attack. "This is a fine way to welcome callers. Mistake me for somebody else."

Louis Buckshot shook his head and grunted. Munroe caught a whiff of liquor and then, looking over at the crude table, saw a bottle, half full.

Joe Moon had come and gone. Louis Buckshot had fallen at last.

"I wait for you," said the half-breed, shortly.

"What's the big idea?" asked Munroe. "Come on, Louis. Don't be foolish. Untie me or you'll be sorry for it."

Louis Buckshot merely shook his head and looked at him, his eyes smoldering, his face stern. He was not drunk, nor yet was he quite sober, and plainly a great change had come over his attitude toward Munroe since the factor's previous visit.

"You try rob me," he said, at last.

"Rob you?" Munroe stared.

What notion had the half-breed taken now?

Louis Buckshot reached behind into a recess of the logs, and produced a crumpled roll of bills, which he placed on the floor in front of him.

"It no good," he said.

Munroe did not understand. He looked at the money. It was the money he had paid the half-breed for his furs. No good?

"Of course it's good."

"Me know," grunted Louis Buckshot obstinately, his eyes flashing with anger.

"But I know it's good. Where do you get that idea?"

"It bad," replied the half-breed, decidedly. "Joe Moon say."

A great light dawned on Munroe. Joe Moon had been here. He had told Louis Buckshot that the money the factor had given him for his furs was worthless. Always distrustful of the white man's money, Louis Buckshot had proven only too receptive to the suggestion.

Munroe realized then that he was facing a serious situation, for Louis Buckshot was plainly very angry and, fortified by a few drinks, there was no telling what he might do. He wished his hands were free, for Louis Buckshot might be minded to seek revenge. He must say nothing to stir the half-breed to further anger.

"Joe Moon's crazy," he laughed. "That money's all right, Louis. You bring that down to Wakina after the break-up and you can buy anything in the store with it. Why should I give you bad money? You use it to buy from me. Have I not always traded fairly with you?"

LOUIS BUCKSHOT thought this over and was evidently disposed to admit that there was something in Munroe's argument, but he clung doggedly to the conviction that the money was bad. He had not wanted to take the money in the first place and then Joe Moon, who had visited him but an hour before, had told him the money was bad. Joe Moon had advised him never to trade with Munroe again; he had said the factor was trying to cheat him.

"It bad," he said. "You take back."

"But I can't take it back, Louis." he argued patiently. "The money is all right."

Louis Buckshot glowered at him. He indicated the money again.

"No good."

"Well, if you don't want the money I'll put the value of the furs on your credit at the store. Or I'll bring goods up here next week and trade, if you like."

"No."

"Well, what do you want me to do then? Where are the furs?"

"Joe Moon got."

"What?"

"I sell 'em Joe Moon." He pointed to the bills again. "Money no good. Joe Moon say. I feel sad for factor try cheat me. Joe Moon give whisky *blanc* so I take. He go 'way."

A wave of anger swept over Munroe as he realized what his enemy had done. He was not even to have the satisfaction of returning to Wakina with the furs he had already bought.

"Joe Moon say he take bad money," went on Louis Buckshot, monotonously. "But I keep."

Yes, it would be just like the trader to attempt to rob the Indian of the "bad" money too. But why had Louis Buckshot kept it?

"We trade," he said, by way of explanation, looking dully at the factor. "Come."

He got up and helped Munroe roughly to his feet, then led the way out of the cabin while the factor, his hands still tied tightly behind his back, followed, wondering what new turn events were taking.

Louis Buckshot went over to Munroe's toboggan and surveyed it in silence. He bent down and handled the packsacks, picked up the rifle and inspected it gravely, looked at the snowshoes, then turned to Munroe.

"You trade bad money wit' me. I trade bad money too," he said, with the hint of a grim smile lurking about the corners of his mouth.

And then, while Munroe looked on, at first hardly understanding, Louis Buckshot carried out a pantomime of purchasing his entire equipment, from dogs to rifle.

He looked at the dogs, walked around them, nodded with satisfaction, and took a couple of bills from the roll in his hand. He stuffed them in Munroe's pocket.

"I buy dogs," he said.

"Quit this foolishness, Louis," ordered Munroe, comprehending and growing angry. "You can't buy these things——"

"I buy," replied the half-breed.

He inspected the toboggan, which he deemed worthy of only one bill, and he put that in Munroe's pocket. He picked up the rifle and looked at it with evident favor, giving the factor three bills for it and then, with a glance at the packsacks and snowshoes, he gave him the rest of the money.

Louis Buckshot had a primitive sense of justice. The white man had tried to cheat him by giving him bad money for his furs; therefore, it seemed quite logical that he should repay the white man in kind, now that he had the opportunity.

Munroe felt strangely helpless as he realized the import of the procedure, but he was hardly prepared for what followed.

Louis Buckshot picked up the rifle, ascertained that it was loaded, then stepped quickly around and undid the thongs which bound the factor's wrists. He motioned to the river, white and silent below them.

"Go," he ordered, prodding Munroe with the rifle barrel.

"I won't go. Don't be a fool, Louis. You can't buy my equipment. I don't want your money."

The half-breed shook his head, and there was no compassion in his face.

"Money bad?" he asked with a sneer.

"You know it's good."

"You take then," he said, as if this conclusively settled the affair. "Go."

Munroe began to realize then that Louis Buckshot really meant to carry through this bargain, and turn him out onto the river without food, without his rifle, without his dogs and toboggan. He looked down the hillside to the trail, which was like an uneven pencil mark on the winding river, and at the leaden sky above the hills, and full understanding of his danger came upon him. It was certain death to venture out on the trail, like this, with a blizzard in the offing.

But Louis Buckshot was not jesting. He was in deadly earnest, and to emphasize it, he followed the factor a few steps, prodding him once more with the rifle barrel. His lips were drawn in a thin, cruel line.

"Go."

Munroe knew he was beaten. He was bewildered, so swiftly had these events transpired, and there was a determination about the half-breed which brooked no opposition. And then, he was in possession of that rifle, his finger lingering close to the trigger. He would shoot, Munroe knew, at the slightest show of resistance, for he was quivering with a sense of injury and wrong, in the belief that Munroe had tried to cheat him of his furs. His implacable sense of justice demanded that the factor be repaid, literally, in his own coin.

Slowly, he walked down toward the river, with a vague idea that perhaps the half-breed would relent, but there was no sound from behind, and when at last he reached the river trail, he looked back. Louis Buckshot was standing at the top of the hill, the rifle in his grasp and, when Munroe stopped, the half-breed raised the rifle, which rang out clearly.

A bullet kicked up a flurry of snow over to one side. There was no use; Louis Buckshot was in earnest.

Dazed, the factor turned again and trudged off down the river trail, into a white silence under a slate sky.

V

THIS plight was serious. He was alone, without food, on the Missabi, and there were many miles between him and the trading post, many miles of bleak river, stretching on and on into a pitiless waste.

He had no snowshoes. This was a big handicap, for he could make but slow progress over the river trail; his feet sank through the crust and the snow dragged at his moccasins like deep sand. The tall trees along the river banks looked down on him, impassively, gloomy and forbidding, and a vast whispering emanated from them as the wind stirred their snow laden branches.

There was something grimly ironical in the fact that he had a pocket full of money. Much good would it do him. It might as well be the worthless paper Louis Buckshot thought it was. He would have given all the money he owned for a pair of snowshoes, for a rifle, for anything that might be of service to him on that terrible trail.

He had one hope. The cabin of the Indian, Michael Angelo, at Spruce Lake, up the river, was a refuge, could he reach it before the brooding storm came up. And a storm was coming. He had not mistaken the signs that morning. The lowering sky showed it, the very trees whispered it. Out on the river, destitute as he was, he would have little chance in a January blizzard, especially if night overtook him and he was still without shelter.

Joe Moon had passed over the trail but a short time before, he observed, for the broad depression of the trader's sled was plainly visible in the snow. But he was not greatly concerned with Joe Moon now; his own danger was too pressing to admit of any other consideration.

He bowed his shoulders to the task of trudging on through that clinging, that dragging snow, toward the ever beckoning, ever receding bends of the wide, white river ahead.

His progress was discouraging. His moccasins seemed to take on weight, each succeeding river bend appeared more difficult to reach than the one before. He struggled against fatigue which was creeping upon him. The moccasins were like leaden weights after a while, but he dared not rest, for the seconds were precious.

The sky was growing darker, and a breeze of deadly innocence swept down the river. It sent the snow scudding before it, like a light filmy veil, and it shook the trees along the river bank to an even greater whispering, nervous and sibilant. Clouds of powdery snow drifted from their branches and hovered like dust in the air.

The trees along the river bank were

shivering unceasingly now, and their whispering changed to a moaning as the wind blew steadily, with increasing force, and the air was filled with tiny snow particles whipped up from all sides.

The innocent breeze was the forerunner of other gusts, which continued with gradually increasing force until all the snow of the river was churned to a shifting mist. Munroe had settled down to a dull mechanical stride now, his eyes were fixed on the trail, and he plunged on like an automaton, hearing only the *crunch-crunch-crunch*, as his feet rose and fell and he drew steadily closer to Spruce Lake, still so far away.

Then came the storm.

There were only a few lazy snow flakes at first, hardly distinguishable from the white dusty whorls blown from the trees and the river, but more came, until Munroe, looking up, was startled to observe that he could no longer see the outlines of the rocky point toward which the trail was winding; it was now only a blur through a swirling of heavy snow flakes—snow flakes which did not drift down pleasantly, but which were driven in white streaks by a bitter, whipping gale.

The wind rose higher, and the snow stung his face, and then it became a hurricane so strident that the snow was now a dense white screen and he could not distinguish the vague shadow of the river point through it at all. Even the trees along the banks became obscured from view and could only be seen dimly as a looming mass on either hand.

The wind shrieked in successive gusts. It roared and howled. It buffeted him furiously. It pounded against him as he struggled forward. There were wild sad sobbings in the upper air, mingled with the whoops of the storm sweeping across the river, as if the storm gods themselves mourned the unleashing of their pitiless monster. A vast threshing sound came from the trees along the river borders. They rocked and swayed before the driving force of the blizzard.

The snow was flung from aloft in thick blinding masses, as if from giant shovels. Munroe could see nothing but snow—a raging whiteness which lashed his face, stormed against his body, crept into every fold of his garments, to the accompaniment of Gargantuan hootings of the mighty wind.

It was very cold, bitterly irresistibly cold. Warmth was sapped from his body, leaving him dull and numb. Against the colossal force of the blizzard he felt as if every effort were futile, but as long as there was strength left in his body he would struggle ahead. The snow had swept over the trail, obliterating it entirely, but he followed a blind course down the centre of the river, through that mass of whiteness, trusting to luck that he would not stumble upon any of those treacherous portions of the river where swift current had thinned the ice and where death was hidden in waiting beneath the surface.

Desperately, indomitably, stumbling forward, with the blizzard beating against his bowed body, Munroe pitted his strength against the overwhelming fury of the storm. He had lost all sense of time. The blizzard raged about him interminably. He knew only that he must go on, must keep moving ahead into that infinity of blinding snow.

He came out upon Spruce Lake at last. The river narrowed at the entrance and high banks loomed up through the snow, from which he realized that he was nearing Michael Angelo's shack, but there was still a quarter of a mile to go. He doubted if he could make it, for he was very weak and miserably cold by then, but he headed instinctively in the direction of the Indian's cabin.

As if furious because he was so near safety, the blizzard seemed to take on redoubled fury. The wind swept down upon him with such titanic force that he reeled and stumbled beneath the blast. His knees weakened. The snow was very deep, and once he sank forward into it, exhausted, feeling unable to go any farther, but he knew that this meant death, and he struggled to his feet again and fought his way a few yards more.

The great trees of the shoreland could be seen as a dark mass ahead and the sight of his goal inspired him to superhuman effort. But his progress was very slow. The blizzard assailed him, malignantly, overwhelmingly.

Out of the snow, immediately ahead of him, rose a dark bulk. He was so numbed by the cold and the fatigue of his incessant struggle that at first he did not comprehend what it was, and did not greatly care, but as he drew closer he saw that it was a sled, with dogs curled up in the lee of it, in the shelter of a jumble of packs.

It must be Joe Moon's sled, he told himself, as he halted exhausted beside it and leaned against the packs. How came it to be here? He wondered vaguely what had become of Joe Moon, for there was no sign of the trader, and then as he looked ahead he saw something which made him catch his breath.

It was a hole in the ice, a gaping, jagged, black hole, not very large—but large enough for a man to fall through.

So that was what had happened to Joe Moon!

Curiously enough, he felt no elation, merely a mild surprize. In his mind's eye he could picture the scene. The treacherous piece of ice, hidden beneath the snow, worn thin by the current, the sudden breaking, the plunge into the icy water, and quick death. So Joe Moon was gone.

Around him the blizzard raged with unabated fury, but he was sheltered from the wind and snow and, although he had been at the point of exhaustion, he felt strength returning to him even from this slight respite. Mechanically, he fumbled at one of the packs, in search of food.

The pack contained a miscellaneous assortment of articles, not the least of which was a can—a can of Joe Moon's whisky *blanc*. For once, the trader's whisky served a useful purpose. With stiff fingers, Munroe unscrewed the cap of the can and gulped down a mouthful of the stinging liquor. It burned his lips, but it sent a glow through him, and he had shaken off some of his lassitude when he continued his search of the pack and found a slab of cold meat.

It was hard as hickory, almost frozen, but he broke off a portion of it and ate it hungrily, chewing vigorously at the tough, cold shreds, finding that it revived his energies, and when he took another drink of the fiery whisky, he tied up the pack again and got to his feet. He felt the bitter snow lashing his face once more, but he accepted the challenge, with hope and courage renewed, with strength again to give battle to the storm.

There was a pair of snowshoes on the sled, and he put them on, then grasped the harness and urged the dogs to rise. They only snarled angrily at him, and finally he took the whip and laid about him so that they got up. He let the lead dog pick his own course toward the shore. He knew the animals had a warning sense that would guide them to avoid treacherous ice, but all the same, he kept well at the rear of the sled as the dogs strained at the harness and moved slowly forward.

The lead dog gave the dark splotch in the ice a wide berth, skirting it by many yards, but finally turned in toward the looming trees, and Munroe, still battered and shaken by the storm, but with new energy and the knowledge that he was nearing the shack on the hillside, which meant safety, plunged doggedly on through the driving snow.

VI

JOE MOON had laughed to himself when he left Louis Buckshot's cabin that morning with Munroe's furs.

"That fool factor will have a fine welcome when he calls in here," he thought, as he swung off up the trail. "Louis is mad enough to kill him after that yarn I gave him about the money. When he gets a few drinks into him he'll be worse."

The trader was highly satisfied with himself. There would be no more interference from Wakina—not after Munroe's crushing defeat. The factor would return to his post without money, without furs, and with the ill-will of Louis Buckshot. And he, Joe Moon, had accomplished all this in the space of twelve hours. A good night's work! He would be unmolested and unopposed in the Missabi region from then on.

But he had not time to linger long in reflections on his victory, complete as that had been. The sled was too heavily loaded, he soon found. It had been piled high with furs even when he reached Louis Buckshot's place, but with the additional booty he had secured there, the dogs were overburdened.

He had not gone two miles before they were tugging at their harness, and their speed had decreased until they were traveling at little more than a walk. He lashed at them with his whip, for he knew that a blizzard was coming up, but he had counted on reaching the cabin at Spruce Lake long before the storm broke. But the sled, heavy and unwieldy, was proving a serious drawback, and he saw, too late, that he had handicapped his progress by taking that big bundle of furs from Louis Buckshot.

When the first gusts of wind came up and told him that the storm would be upon him shortly, he lashed at the dogs again and again, but they had traveled far and were weary, their tongues were hanging out, and one of them was whining. Joe Moon cursed them for a lazy pack of mongrels and swung the whip over them again, but it produced only a brief spurt, and they settled back to a slow pace once more.

He wished he had not tried to bring out so many furs. Even without the rich prize he had secured at the half-breed's cabin, the load had been heavier than usual; but those furs had proven a temptation too strong to resist.

However, the harm could not be undone. He was perturbed, but not seriously alarmed, for he judged that the blizzard might be even yet some time in breaking, but therein his judgment erred, for it swept down upon him while he was still some distance from the lake. As it came he shouted to his dogs and lashed them again with his long whip.

They came out upon Spruce Lake and, although the blizzard was increasing in fury and snow beat down upon him, Joe Moon felt triumphant for there was only a short distance to go now, and, although the dogs were plainly tired, he judged that they were at least good for the quarter of a mile to Michael Angelo's shack.

He was a powerful man, but the relentless buffetings of the wind, and the bitter cold, began to tell even on Joe Moon. The snow was an opaque, shifting mass, and he could see nothing else, but he set his teeth and the whip rose and fell like a flail upon the struggling dogs.

Then the lead dog looked about him uncertainly, faltered, and stopped.

"You yellow beast," roared Joe Moon, through the storm, and he lashed the dog unmercifully. The animal showed its teeth, snarling, and cowered beneath the whip, but it refused to budge forward another step. It lay down in the snow, the others doing likewise, and no amount of lashing with the cruel whip would urge them to stumble to their feet again.

Joe Moon cursed and raged, kicked at the dogs, furiously angry. He could not understand it. They had been tired, certainly, but they could well go a hundred yards more to shore. But the lead dog, despite a terrific beating, would not move.

"Stubborn as a mule," stormed Joe Moon, as he dealt the animal another blow and then cast the whip aside in his temper. He did not want to abandon his sled, but the blizzard had grown so furious that it appeared he would have to go on alone.

Uncertainly, he stepped forward a few paces, and then looked back. To have the dogs give up, when he was so close to shelter! He looked back at them as they cowered into the shelter of the sled and cursed them. Then he turned his face toward the shore and plunged forward into the swirling snow.

He took but two steps. Then he felt his footing shift beneath him, and, above the roar of the storm, sounded an ominous crackling. He threw himself violently ahead, for he knew he had come upon a thin, treacherous spot in the ice, a danger spot the dogs had sensed, and as he plunged the ice gave way beneath him, and he was waist deep in deadly black water.

He had fallen onto firmer ice, for the thin portion was not of great extent, and he lay sprawled there, his legs splashing in the river. The current was swift, the water was very cold. It was only by a miracle that he had escaped total immersion, which would have meant death, but he was able to work himself slowly ahead until he dragged himself out of the chilly water, and lay panting in the snow beside the hole. It had been a narrow escape.

But had he escaped? From waist down, his clothes were soaked and, as if by magic, they began to freeze upon him and, panic-stricken, he struggled to his feet and staggered through the snow toward the shore. His snowshoes were like two blocks of ice upon his stiffening moccasins, encased in frozen snow, and they dragged him down like lead weights.

When he reached the clearing which led up to the cabin, he was shivering. The force of the storm was broken somewhat by the surrounding trees, and he could see the cabin some distance ahead, but a deadly chill was creeping upon him. Every step he took required infinite labor. His garments had become an armor of ice.

He toiled weakly up the slope, his teeth chattering, his lips blue, in his eyes the fear of death, and at last he reached the door. He leaned against it in his exhaustion and fumbled at the thong of moosehide. His fingers were numb in his heavy mittens as he tugged at it, but finally the door swung open and he staggered into the hut. The cabin was empty and cheerless. Joe Moon cursed the luck that had sent Michael Angelo out on his trapline at this time. The Indian had another shack, far out in the woods, at the end of the line, where he was doubtless now waiting for the blizzard to pass over.

HE BEGAN to feel frightened, for his body was of a horrible numbness now, and he bent and fumbled frantically at the snowshoes and the moccasins, a shapeless, frozen mass upon his feet. From waist down, it was as if he had been carved from ice. His soaked trousers had frozen stiffly, his heavy socks were rigid. He knew too well the danger of leaving on those wet clothes, and he stripped them off him at once.

The cabin was deathly cold, but there was no time to lose. He could light a fire later. Dry clothing was the immediate need. He found a pair of ragged trousers belonging to Michael Angelo, hanging on the wall and, after hastily rubbing his lower limbs dry with a blanket from the bunk, he put them on and then found a pair of thick socks.

He was shivering more violently than ever when he had donned them, for the relief was only temporary and he knew he must have a fire. The shock of the wetting, and the cruel toil of that desperate journey to the cabin had weakened him.

There was birch bark and some wood in a corner, and he quickly piled some in the battered stove, then felt in his pockets for a match. There were none in the mackinaw and then he stepped suddenly over to the trousers he had discarded and there, in a pocket, he found a sodden box of matches, wet, useless.

Terror seized him. He went over to a crude shelf on the wall, where Michael Angelo had an untidy collection of odds and ends, and poked through them. There were no matches there. Not even flint and steel, for the Indian had doubtless taken those materials with him when he went out on the trapline.

He was cold, desperately cold. He must have fire. Joe Moon looked at the stove, with the wood and birch bark merely awaiting a flame, and he scratched the sodden matches against the iron front, hoping that by some miracle they would light. But there was no miracle.

There were matches in his packs, he remembered, but he couldn't go back to the sled. As if to emphasize this conviction, the wind shrieked about the corners of the cabin and the snow threshed against the door. He stumbled over to the little window and looked out. The blizzard was raging with greater fury than before. He could see the tall trees, looming like shadows through the storm, as they rocked and swayed before the sweeping wind.

He turned and began to search the cabin again with frantic abandon in the faint hope of finding a match. He tore the blankets from the bunk and cast them aside, he groveled in corners, again he searched through the pockets of his mackinaw, again he struck wet matches against the stove, and all the while the cold swept over him as remorselessly as a shadow.

The little stove appeared to mock him as he looked at it, in blind, unreasoning panic, and saw the wood and birchbark, cold and dead, but with all the potentialities of warmth and life. The January night would be desperately cold, he knew. He would freeze to death. Even now he was freezing.

"Up against it," he muttered, as he desisted at length from his vain search and flung himself upon the bunk.

Joe Moon had gambled with the wilderness before, but never had the wilderness held the winning hand as now. Death lurked in the blizzard, death hovered within the chill cabin. Every shriek of the wind had a malicious note of triumph. All the forces of that storm-swept land were conspired in a unity of terrific strength against him. He tried to stamp up and down the cabin, swinging his great arms across his chest to restore circulation, but he was exhausted and the cold had so penetrated his body that he could not maintain the effort. His breath drifted in a white cloud before his haggard face.

It was suicidal to go out to the sled, but it was certain doom to remain. The storm was worse, and every moment he delayed made even the slim chances of securing matches from the sled more remote than ever. His searching fingers came across a coin in one of the pockets of his coat and the gambling instinct in him again rose to the surface.

"Heads I stay; tails I don't," he said, and tossed the coin into the air. It fell to the floor with a ringing note. He glanced at it. The head was up.

"One's as bad as the other."

He would stay in the cabin.

One little match! So small, yet meaning so much to him. But there was not even a particle of food in the cabin, much less a match. He wrapped the blankets from the bunk about him but the gripping chill persisted and his mind was becoming dulled. The cold was overpowering, terrific in its invisible force. He fought against a gradual languor, a vast drowsiness.

Joe Moon felt like a fly, caught in a web of inexorable circumstance. If he had only stayed at Louis Buckshot's cabin! He knew that a storm was approaching. If only he had not taken that last load of furs! If only he had paid heed to the warning of his dogs when they refused to go ahead, knowing somehow of the hidden danger.

Then, when he sat down on the bunk again, cold consuming him, a great lassitude creeping over him, terror in his heart, the door swung suddenly open and Hugh Munroe strode across the threshold. He was covered with snow from head to foot, he carried a rifle, his face was that of a man who has been face to face with death, and to Joe Moon he was an avenging specter.

VII

MONROE leaned against the closed door, too tired from his struggle through the storm to even feel the emotion of surprize at seeing Joe Moon confront him from across the cabin. He could hardly yet realize that he had indeed escaped the blinding, smiting fury of the storm, that the wild, interminable fight with those forces of wind and snow had ended in his favor. He leaned against the door, breathing heavily, but he was not so exhausted, not so chilled, as the shuddering man on the bunk.

Joe Moon gazed at him, apathetically, open-mouthed, and then hope rushed back over him like a flood. To his dulled mind there came such a feeling of elation at seeing another human being in this place, a human being who would certainly have matches, that Munroe was not to him the factor of Wakina, the man he had so wronged and beaten; all those things seemed very trivial and far away in the overwhelming sense of his peril.

"A match!" gasped Joe Moon hoarsely, starting up. "I'm freezing to death—fell in the river—light a fire ——"

Munroe fumbled at his mackinaw, and it dropped from his shoulders to the floor, and then he brushed the snow from his streaming face. He did not reply to Joe Moon, but his heart leaped as he realized the plight of his enemy. He flung his mittens on the floor and sat down upon an empty box near by.

He wanted to think. The advantage was in his grasp. How to use it? He was breathing heavily, as if emerging from a stupor. And a stupor it had been, a stupor of incessant, desperate struggling in a maelstrom of snow, a stupor of battling for progress through clouds, sheets, walls of beating snow, a stupor of resistance to mighty, cruhsing winds, a stupor that had seemed so interminable that when he closed his eyes he could still see the swirling snow before him and could almost feel again the buffetings of the wind.

But he was safe. The discovery of Joe Moon's sled had been his deliverance, and now he was in the cabin, the dogs in shelter outside. He had taken Joe Moon's rifle from the sled, on impulse, before entering the cabin and this made him utterly master of the situation. Even without the rifle he felt that he would be the master, for the man across from him was not the powerful brute who had beaten him back in the Nogassaw village, but an exhausted, weakened creature.

"Don't you hear?" Joe Moon was saying in a broken, unearthly voice. "I'm freezing, man. Light the fire—the fire."

He looked up and stared at Joe Moon, as if seeing him there for the first time. He saw his enemy hunched up on the bunk; he saw the frozen garments, the icy moccasins, the snowshoes, on the floor; he saw the stove, with fragments of dry birch bark and wood sticking out over the open top; he saw that the trader was shivering, and that his face was gray with cold.

"I've no matches, don't you understand?" Joe Moon's voice was high-pitched, almost a cream; Munroe sensed the desperations and the tension behind the words. "For God's sake light the fire. You must have matches!"

A plan was forming in Munroe's mind. Here was his opportunity.

"Yes," he said. "I have matches."

He fumbled in his pocket and felt the small metal box.

Strange that it should be Joe Moon who was depending on him like this. Strange that it should be left to him to save Joe Moon by lighting a fire. Strange that it should be for him to help the man who had robbed him, ruined him.

"Light the fire, then! Light the fire!" Joe Moon spat out the words between chattering teeth, and great shudders coursed through his body. "Hurry! Hurry! ——, man, we'll both freeze to death."

Munroe's fingers touched the box again. So small it was. Just a tiny metal box. But so important. Matches meant life. Joe Moon had none. It was in Munroe's keeping whether or not the fire was lighted.

Into Joe Moon's face had crept a curious expression of bewilderment. He licked his lips, nervously. Was the factor mad? Had the struggle with the blizzard affected his mind, that he should hesitate to light the fire? It was unthnikable.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked, getting up unsteadily from the bunk. "Light the fire, you fool! Light it! I'm freezing. I fell in the river, I tell you; know what that means. Hurry!"

Munroe got to his feet and grasped the rifle more tightly.

"If I light the fire will you promise to get out of the fur country? You know what you've done to our trade with your whisky business. Will you get out? Will you turn your furs over to me and go away from here?"

Understanding dawned upon Joe Moon.

"You fool!" he gasped. "Try to bargain ——"

Without warning, he plunged at Munroe. So sudden was the attack that the factor did not have time to raise the rifle before Joe Moon was upon him, a wild light in his eyes, a look of desperation upon his haggard, unshaven countenance. Munroe ducked instinctively as the trader's great fist swung for his face. The blow was weak and slow, and Munroe regained his coolness, for he realized that Joe Moon was weakened from exhaustion and cold.

He struggled to raise the rifle, but the trader's great body was crushed against him, so he quickly dropped the gun and struck viciously for Joe Moon's face. He could hear a savage grunt as the blow landed and then Joe Moon lashed out with flailing arms and Munroe felt a fist crash against his cheek and he was borne heavily to the floor.

The blow was of no account, but the trader was heavy and Munroe wriggled quickly to get away from him, landing a sharp blow to Joe Moon's stomach as he did so. He heard a sharp smack, and a groan as the trader swung at him blindly and missed, his fist striking the floor.

They had tumbled clear of the rifle, and each thought of it at the same moment and reached desperately for it. Munroe's finger's were closing over the stock when his arm was suddenly swept aside and he saw Joe Moon's great hand above the gun. He gritted his teeth and jabbed at the trader's throat, and Joe Moon gasped in pain and his hand fell impotently above the rifle.

They fought sluggishly, for both were tired and cold, but Moon fought with little strength, little else than the desperate hope of a beaten man. They rolled over and over upon the floor, against the wall, against the stove, and Munroe kicked the rifle out of reach.

He dealt Joe Moon a smashing blow on the mouth, and then his opponent's cold fingers somehow found his throat and clung there like grim death. Munroe lashed out viciously to rid himself of that choking grasp, while Joe Moon, his eyes closed, his breath coming in tearing sobs, clung to him with all his dying strength. Munroe knew that one more blow would finish him and he struck upward, fiercely, with every flagging energy, and he felt a savage joy as his fist crashed full against Joe Moon's jaw and the clutching fingers loosened, and he wrenched himself away.

Swiftly he sprawled out over the floor and grabbed the rifle, but there was little need for it. Joe Moon was beaten.

* * *

THE trader lay weakly on the floor, his face bleeding, his huge frame inert. As Munroe got unsteadily to his feet and covered him with the gun he mumbled futile curses and then, opening his eyes, saw the rifle and terror leaped into his face.

"Don't shoot—don't shoot," he whispered hoarsely. "I'm licked. I'll do anything you want."

"You'll leave the fur country?"

"I can't," gasped Joe Moon. "I can't

leave—don't make me go—anything at all—but don't make me leave."

Monroe looked at his enemy, broken in defeat, lying before him, and a swift comprehension crossed his mind.

"What do the police want you for?"

It was a chance shot, but Joe Moon's eyes widened, and he crawled slowly to his knees, shaking his head wearily.

"How do you know?" he mumbled. "How do you know—they're after me?"

"Never mind." Munroe strove to suppress the elation in his voice. He had stumbled upon Joe Moon's secret. "It's enough that I know. Don't lie, Joe Moon, or I'll put a bullet through you. What are they after you for?"

The trader swayed unsteadily.

"Escape," he gasped. "I got out of Stony Mountain pen ——"

"So you came up here to hide?"

Joe Moon nodded, and then he crawled weakly over to the bunk and collapsed upon it. He was shivering again and Munroe, realizing that he was very cold himself, went over to the stove, still keeping a wary eye upon his enemy. But Joe Moon was beaten.

Munroe took out the box of matches, lighted one, and dropped it into the stove.

The yellowish flame caught the birch bark. It spread rapidly to the sticks of wood, which snapped and burned.

"There's your fire," he said shortly. "I've got your sled outside."

Joe Moon made no reply but lay shivering upon the bunk and Munroe, after looking at him for a moment, turned and left the cabin, still carrying the rifle.

He returned a moment later, lugging two packs, which he dropped upon the floor.

"There's grub there, and a sleeping bag," he said. "We'll at least be comfortable here till morning."

He wondered how to insure his own safety through the night. Joe Moon might not be as utterly beaten as he looked. The flickering firelight shone upon an object on the wall beside the bunk upon which the trader was lying, and Munroe stepped over to it. The object was one of Michael Angelo's traps, stapled to a log. It was a big trap, with powerful jaws, attached to the staple by a heavy chain and, on a sudden inspiration, he roughly turned Joe Moon over on his side. The trader was too exhausted and beaten to struggle or protest. Monroe pulled his enemy's coat aside and found the waistband of the trousers, then forced apart the jaws of the trap and snapped them over the rough cloth.

Joe Moon was secure. The trap was at his back and so strong were its jaws that it would be difficult, almost impossible, for him to release himself without getting out of his trousers altogether, and this would mean noise. But Munroe had little fear that Moon would try to take advantage of any slumber into which he would fall during the night. Joe Moon was beaten.

"Tomorrow," he said, standing beside the bunk. "You'll turn over your furs to me. I'll settle for them with the Indians. Then you're going to get out of the country."

"I'll tell you, I can't" mumbled Joe Moon. "They'll catch me again. They'll send me back—to finish my term."

"You can take your chances on that. You're lucky to have the chance. For if you don't get out of this country tomormor I'm going to tell the mounties that you're up here."

Joe Moon started up, and was brought to a sudden stop by the trap.

"You won't do that—you won't tell them ——"

"Will you get out then"?

The trader sank back on the bunk again.

"I'll go. I'll get out tomorrow. But don't tell the mounties. You can have the furs—everything—I'll go."

"That's the way to talk," said Munroe, going over to one of the packs and commencing to rummage for food. "Just for that you can sleep on the bunk all night. I've got the sleeping bag."

There was no answer from Joe Moon.

Munroe began to whistle as he took food from the pack. In the morning Joe Moon would go away from the Missabi forever. The trade of the Wakina post was saved.

The blizzard still howled furiously outside but, mingled with its howling, was the exultant crackle of the fire.

The Camp-Fire

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

AS TO "cows" *vs* "steers"—something from J. Allan Dunn of our writers' brigade:

Holmes, New York.

About the word "cows" as opposed to "steers." I have let the older-timers than myself tell this Henry person that his rope is dragging, though I had cowboys in my own outfit that had ridden the trail in earlier days.

But this I know that, after the first beef-herds of steers and cows came up from Texas to the commissaries of the northern army during the Civil War, thus starting the cattle ranching industry; that those who then commenced raising cattle, instead of merely buying low in Texas and selling at war prices, went down to Texas where they were cheap—something round six dollars a head—and brought back *cows* because *cows* were what they wanted for increase. Texas longhorn *cows* and imported or eastern sires. The steers, or young male beef-cattle, were good for meat, the old steers no good at all, the *cows* as essential to their enterprise as hens are to those who raise poultry.

Those herders punched fifty cows to one steer. The title "cow-puncher" was honestly earned. The cattleman sells his three-year-old steers and keeps his heifers for more calves. His herd today is primarily a cow herd.

MORE testimony as to the severity of a tarantula bite and as to the cures therefor:

Mountain Grove, Missouri.

I have been reading right along about the different ideas along the subject of tarantula bites and its effects. I have lived the past fifteen years in Texas down in the southwestern parts where a few tarantulas grow. I have seen them near San Antonio where I lived before coming here, as big as my spread hand. Both kinds, if there are both, the reddish colored ones and blueish ones.

NOW to the point. In 1888 my father, working as a cowpuncher in Colling County, Texas, while riding herd, came up to a pile of brush, reached down to pick up a stick and was bitten on the wrist by a tarantula as big as he has ever seen. He says he had it put in a quart fruit-jar and it just would go in. He immediately went to town about twenty-five miles away (McKinney) and went to a medical doctor who said he had blood-poison and wanted to cut his arm off. I forgot to mention that his arm was swollen to the shoulder and was turning greenish black. Then he went to a horse doctor and told him his trouble and the doctor took a knife and slit his wrist this way and let a lot of blood run out and then took a bottle of chloroform and poured on it and bandaged it up.

Dad said when the spider bit him he thought a hornet had stung him until he saw the spider. In about two months the cut had healed up, but still left the scar of the tarantula's bite.

I hope this letter will not cause an argument on my part, for I do not wish to bring anything of that sort my way. The spider was sent to a guy who edited a farm paper in Toronto, Canada, in the same year. Also I have seen only one or two centipedes in my time. So *adios.*—WAYNE LUPTON.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Leslie McFarlane rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine.

I have sat in at the Camp-Fire for a few years past and have found it a warm and cheerful place, redolent of honest friendliness and genuine companionship. In conforming to custom by advancing into the glare of the Fire for a few moments, I do so with some hesitancy, even though I know my listeners are kind of heart and informal enough to put the veriest tenderfoot at his ease. And my feet are not yet hardened to the trails of the world, save a small part of it covered in a reporter's scurryings hither and yon, my experience has been slight and my adventures have been few—to some, no doubt, they would hardly seem adventures at all.

I'M 22 years of age. "*The River Trail,*" in fact, was accepted on my 22nd birthday, and as my years are few, this sketch will necessarily be brief. I am a Canadian and, despite the Scottish flavor to my name, am of North of Ireland stock. Since 1910 I have lived in Northern Ontario, for the most part in Haileybury, which many at the Camp-Fire may remember as being just five miles north of the Cobalt silver camp, and others may remember as having been razed to the ground by bush fire two years ago. The rough and ready days of Cobalt were practically over when my people came North, but the gold camps were just hitting their stride and this part of Northern Ontario was just beginning to find itself.

For the past five years I've been in newspaper work in the North, as a preliminary to writing The Great Canadian Novel. We cherish that beautiful myth on this side of the line, too. However, reportorial and desk work, covering everything from hockey matches to bush fires, crowded the five years and I found newspaper work to be a snare and a delusion in that when the day's end came I was too sick of writing to dig into the aforesaid G. C. N. So I stepped out of it, found that there had been a field of romance and rugged beauty right under my nose all the time, and settled down to trying to put my own North on paper. I have found, among other things, that I do not know this big country as well as I had thought, I doubt if any one could ever really know it, and as for putting it on paper—it seems an impertinence. But it is worth the attempt and if, in so doing, I can spin a yarn that may bring an approving nod or so from those about the Fire, I'll be more than satisfied. So let me slip back into the shadow again, where one's tender years are not so painfully evident.—LESLIE MCFARLANE.

WHAT this comrade enclosed was some photographs of the four American aeroplanes leaving Prince Rupert, B. C., for Sitka, Alaska, and in other positions on their around-the world-flight. Too bad our paper won't give good half-tone results in reproduction.

Skeena River, British Columbia.

I enclose something that will no doubt be of interest to you. These are of interest to all lovers of adventure.

I HAVE been a reader of your publication for many years. I am a semi-Diesel engineer and work on the small tow-boat that takes the fishing-boats out to the fishing-grounds in Chatham Sound at night and tows them in in the morning. These men are a mixture of Japs, Indians and whites. I have been to sea nearly all my life, in fact since as a foolish kid in London I decided that going to sea was infinitely preferable to learning how to manufacture scientific instruments. I have had a few adventures but they were very tame to what some men have gone through.

Had a job this last Winter. Engineer of a Government boat packing 800 cases of gelegnite around the Gulf of Georgia. Any weather, must keep the mines going. It's great to be tearing through a November storm on a dark, howling night with a load of that die-in-a-minute beneath you, in a 60-foot converted yacht. Was light-keeper and engineer on a lighthouse near here.

Excuse this somewhat disjointed and rambling epistle as I am out of practise in writing.—JIM E. GIBSON.

P. S.—I am writing this in the engine-room; must catch the night mail-boat. Excuse finger marks.

FOLLOWING our custom of announcing the appearance in book form of stories published in our magazine, or of other stories in similar vein by our authors, we are glad to let you know that the following books have appeared or will appear on the market: "Wide Waters," by Captain Dingle, Brentano, New York; "Seibert of the Islands," by Gordon Young, T. Fisher Unwin, London; "Ordeal," by Dale Collins, Knopf, New York; "Many Dogs There Be," by Walter A. Dyer, Century, New York; "Tales of the Oldtimers," by F. R. Bechdolt, Century, New York. We will publish annually a notice similar to this covering as completely as possible the whole year.

A correction is due. I stated that none of F. St. Mars' stories had appeared in book form on this side of the Atlantic, but comrade George G. Dusman informed me that the Frederick A. Stokes Company had published "The Way of the Wild." It is now, unfortunately, out of print. Several volumes of his stories have been published in England.

Mr. Dusman's letter follows:

Baltimore, Maryland.

I see in the December 30th issue that not only yourself, but others, have wished for a book of F. St. Mars' stories. There has been one book published that I know of, by Frederick A Stokes Co., of New York, under the title of "The Way of the Wild." It is known in England as "Pinion and Claw." If Z. G. Deutsch of the S. S. *Steel Traveler* will call on me the next time he is in Baltimore, I will be glad to loan it to him while he is in port. Perhaps this information has been sent in before, but may be some of the bunch did not get it.

I have had a little adventure myself, but nothing worth mentioning. Was in the mix-up by doing duty behind a gun at Yorktown, spending one day in France, three months in Cuba, and plenty of time chasing up and down the coast looking for nothing. If any of the old bunch off the *Pennsy* remembers "Dutch," I wish they would drop me a line.—George G. Dusman.

HERE goes my last nut snake. Out of all the queer snakes—hoop, glass, etc.—I'd picked out the cow-milking snake as the one for me personally to hitch on to and believe in. It would account so nicely for the scarcity of milk from the two cows I support for the sake of the milk and butter I don't get. At least it would in summer, which, I take it, is the milking season for snakes. And now here goes the milk snake!

San Francisco, California.

Now, I think I'd like to discourse a little on the Class *Reptilia*, with particular reference to the Order *Ophidia*, as it were. From reading Camp-Fire, it seems to me that a poor snake, nowadays, is like a married Democrat in California—he gets so much advice that it's small wonder certain ones have taken to the desert and move sideways; anybody would be dizzy. I refer, of course, to the two Schools of Dietetics for Serpents, including all those if any, which A. S. H. has, or had, reason to believe were working on his dairy-herd.

NOT long ago I grew inquisitive abour Central American Ophidians and wrote *the* authority, Raymond Ditmars of the New York Zoological Park. Referred to that constrictor of Salvador, the "massacuatta," on which I did a filler—as you may recall. In his reply, he took occasion to slam the milk-drinking theory quite huskily:

"I am decidedly sceptical about the alleged suckling habits. *We have never induced snakes to take an interest in milk.*" (Italics mine.)

Remembering the Camp-Fire discussion, and other like statements of Ditmars in his big book on Reptilia; recalling, too, stories of India by Kipling, et al., about the sacred cobras which have their saucers of milk, I wrote him again, remarking on these milk-drinking cobras:

"Is this bunkum on the part of the writers? I have read your description of Hamadryas (the 12-ft. 'King Cobra'; said by Ditmars to be entirely cannibalistic in captivity.—E. C.) in the Reptile House and it occurs to me that you made in your book references to your failure to induce snakes to accept milk. So I wondered if the King Cobra and the Spectacled Cobra, say, differed in the matter of diet; one demanding snakes and the other accepting (in India at least) milk. It occurred to me, also, that if snakes would drink milk, were fond enough of it to go chasing farmers' cows and milking them to secure it, you of all the world would rejoice, since it would so materially simplify your feeding-problems!"

Professor Ditmars replies: "I take no stock in cobras being tempted with saucers of milk, and am quite convinced that the tale has resulted from imagination or supposition on the part of fiction-writers."

Personally, even though he doesn't think a great deal of my class (apparently), I'm trailing with Ditmars. If any one else in the country knows as much as he has forgotten about snakes, they—in my opinion—know quite a great deal.—Eugene Cunningham.

READERS have called our attention to a mistake in a map accompanying Hugh Pendexter's "The Homesteaders." The map furnished us by Mr. Pendexter was correct, but the artist copying from it for reproduction changed "Minnesota River" to "Missouri River" and we of the editorial department failed to catch the blunder. Our apologies.

A CONTEMPORARY newspaper account of the murder of Wild Bill Hickok and the first trial of Jack McCall, sent us by one of the women comrades of Camp-Fire.

Black Hills, South Dakota.

So much has been printed in *Adventure* concerning the death of Wild Bill (J. B. Hickok) and so many conflicting accounts, that perhaps your readers will be interested in an account written at the time of his death by the editor of the Deadwood *Pioneer*, a newspaper still in circulation. Readers appreciate the efforts to run those conflicting rumors to a correct ending.—Mrs. Hoover.

The following account of the assassination of J. B. Hickock (Wild Bill), is taken from the issue of the Deadwood *Pioneer* of Aug. 5, 1876:

ON WEDNESDAY about three o'clock the report was started that J. B. Hickock (Wild Bill) was killed. On repairing to the hall of Nutall & Mann it was ascertained that the report was too true. We found the remains of Wild Bill lying on the floor. The murderer, Jack McCall, was captured after a lively chase by many of our citizens and taken to a building at the lower end of the city and a guard placed over him.

“As soon as this was accomplished, a coroner’s jury was summoned, with C. H. Sheldon as foreman, who after hearing all the evidence, which was to the effect that while Wild Bill and others were seated at a table playing cards, Jack McCall walked in and around directly back of his victim, and when within three feet of him raised his revolver and exclaiming “—— you, take that,” and fired, the ball entering at the back of the head and coming out at the center of the right cheek, causing instant death, rendering a verdict in accordance with the above facts.

“Preparations for a trial were then made by calling a meeting of citizens at the theater building. Immediately after the theater was over the meeting was called to order, Judge W. L. Kuykendall presiding. After a statement by the president of the object of the meeting, the gentlemen present, numbering one hundred, elected Judge Kuykendall to preside at the meeting, as judge, in the trial of the cause. Isaac Brown was elected sheriff, and one deputy and twelve guards were appointed. It was then decided to adjourn to meet at nine o’clock A. M., Thursday, August 3rd, in order that the gentlemen appointed for the purpose might have time to announce the meeting and its object to the miners of the Whitewood and Deadwood mining districts.

“At nine o’clock Thursday the meeting was called pursuant to adjournment, when the action of the previous meeting was submitted for adoption or rejection, and after some remarks were adopted. Col. May was chosen prosecuting attorney, and A. B. Chapline was selected by the prisoner, but owing to the sickness, Mr. Chapline was unable to attend and Judge Miller was chosen in his place. A committee of three was then appointed by the chairman, one from each district, whose duty it was to select the names of thirty-three residents from each of their respective districts, and from these persons so chosen, the jury was afterward obtained. Mr. Reid, of Gayville, James Harrington, of this city, and Mr. Coin, of Montana City, were the gentlemen appointed for this purpose. At this time the meeting adjourned.

“At two o’clock the trial was commenced, and lasted until six. The evidence in the case was the same as that before the coroner’s jury, so far as the prosecution was concerned. The defense was that the deceased at some place in Kansas, killed the prisoner’s brother, for which he killed the deceased. The jury, after being out an hour and thirty minutes, returned with the following verdict:

Deadwood City,

“We, the jury, find Mr. John McCall not guilty. (Signed) Charles Whitehead, Foreman; J. J. Bump, L. D. Bookaw, J. H. Thompson, S. S. Hopkins, J. F. Cooper, Alex Travis, F. Towle, J. E. Thompson, L. A. Judd, Ed Burke, John Mann, Jury.”

“Thus ended the scenes of the day that settled a matter of life and death, with one living, whose life was in the hands of twelve fellow men, whose duty it was to decide upon the guilt or innocence of the accused, charged with the murder of Wild Bill, who while the trial was in progress, was being laid in the cold, cold ground in the Valley of Whitewood, by kind hands that were ever ready to administer to his sufferings while living, and ready to perform the painful duty of laying him in his last resting place.

“(Editor’s Note:—Though McCall escaped paying any penalty for his crime at Deadwood, he was subsequently arrested, tried and executed at Yankton.)”

OUT of our cache comes this 1923 letter. It was one of the letters from readers that dispelled any doubts as to continuing to keep the love-interest either subordinated in our stories or entirely out of them. Some letters from readers desiring more love-interest in our fiction caused me to put the question up to all of you, but your vote was overwhelmingly against it. For which I’m darned glad.

United States Fleet, Battle Fleet
Battleship Division Five
U. S. S. *Tennessee*

As the bosun’s mate says, “Now dya hear dis?” Please don’t heave this out the port until you read a few lines of my wonderful literature. Have just finished reading the May 10th (1923) issue and after reading over the interesting letters in “Camp-Fire” I decided I would not put off driving you crazy any longer, so here goes.

IN REFERENCE to the letters published in the above mentioned issue I wish to assert that I agree with the writers of those opposing the introduction of love-stories into *Adventure*. I have been a reader of that magazine for about seven years and as far as I can remember every story which was published during that time was one that would hold the attention of the reader until the very end, and I have yet to read the love-story that will hold my attention all the way through. I also want adventure; I have had some adventure but not enough to suit me; I just can’t seem to run across it at all times, which is what I would like to be able to do. I am still young, but ever since I was sixteen, and that was six years ago, I have been on the go as much as possible.

I have slept in an Eskimo’s igloo, seen a South Sea Islander undergoing the torture which they call tattooing, chatted with the charming señoritas of the South American Republics, seen Mount Fujiyama, outdistanced a bunch of what seemed to be Mexican bandits, talked sign language with a Costa Rican, seen the American colors in Nicaragua, been nearly croaked in Shanghai, and broke in Subic. I have somewhat neglected the States however, for I have never been in the Southern States.

ANYHOW I realize that I can not stop now, for I have tried it and it won’t work, I can’t seem to stay in one place very long. But, even when traveling around this little old world of ours one doesn’t always find adventure as I classify it. What I call adventure is something out of the ordinary, such as being alone at sea in an outrigger canoe, with sixteen miles of water to traverse before reaching land, and then to have one of those squalls for which the tropics are noted descend upon you. I have experienced just that very thing and that is my reason for giving it as an example, for it was the biggest adventure which I have ever experienced in my mind.

In my opinion it would ruin *Adventure* to start publishing love-stories in what is now a real red-blooded man’s magazine. What man doesn’t enjoy a story full of action and thrills without the improbable happenings of a dime novel and the mushy love-scenes of a love-story? Such stories should even appeal to the lounge-lizard and finale-hopper type which is now coming into existence in the States, and the four letters from women go to show that such stories appeal to a large number of our feminine population. As Mr. Johnston states in his letter, there are plenty of magazines on the market which are full of love-stories, and plenty of Diamond Dick stories are to be had, to satisfy those who desire that type of fiction, so why on earth should they want to change *Adventure?* Haven't they enough of their trash to occupy their hours for reading, or do they just hate to see any one besides themselves enjoy a story?

IN CLOSING I wish to state that the girls who wrote the letters published in "Camp-Fire" have the spirit which I admire in women. Such women are hard to find now-a-days. They all seem to have gone jazz-mad or something, and a woman who loves the great outdoors and likes to travel and see things, instead of spending her time on a dance-floor or smoking cigarets and drinking in order to get a "kick" out of life, is what I call a real woman, and one for Uncle Sam to be proud of.—DOUGLAS McDOUGAL.

THIS is out of a personal letter from Raymond S. Spears of our writers' brigade and "Ask Adventure." You may remember I printed his letter in favor of Prohibition and my reply along with it. Before doing so I sent him my reply to make sure there was in it no offense when none was intended. What follows is from his answer, saying he found none, and was added merely from the fullness of his heart. A very American heart.

WHAT he says I commend particularly to our foreign-born Americans. What we call "Americanization" is tragically incomplete and ineffective. The blame therefor lies with us native-born, not with our immigrant citizens. Careless, we leave them to form their idea of America by looking about them. What they see is mostly selfishness and greed—and natural resources. The better things they can not see, and we have been at little pains to show them.

But these better things exist. Nearly buried under the gross materialism that grips us abide still some of the ideals planted here by the forefathers who came to the wilderness for religious and political freedom and made stronger by each ax-blow, rifle-shot and plowed furrow of pioneer ancestors turning three-thousand miles of continent into America They came and pioneered for gain as well as for liberty and ideals, but the very nature of what they had to do was cleansing and freeing to them as a people.

THE foreign-born are rather inclined to resent any claim that the native-born are better Americans than they. Why shouldn't they sneer? After all, we are not such particularly noble animals to look at and such virtues as we have are, many of them, not displayed on the surface. It is, of course, our own fault, but the foreign-born generally fail to consider below the surface. The spirit that out of a wilderness erected a nation to take its place among the others in only a tenth the time required to erect those others, that in so doing took one of the world's biggest strides toward human liberty and justice, that in three short centuries not only turned the wilderness into one of the world's most advanced and powerful nations—well, it takes that kind of spirit a long time to die and it passes on in the blood from one generation to the next. Pioneering and real building breed qualities that can not come from a mere living in some old civilization and we native-born of today are only a step away from pioneering days. Many Western pioneers still live; in the Middle West the fathers and grandfathers of living Americans did the pioneering. In the East it is not much farther back to the days when there was a wild Indian border. Good things have come to today's native-born Americans. These constitute America's best ideals. Not easy to see under our growing materialism but—here. Not better than others' perhaps, but not found in the same kind elsewhere. Individual, America's, ours. And good.

For example, our country, since it became a nation, has known no other rule than democracy. Our immigrants come from countries upon which ages of depotism have been imprinted. The inherited instinct of centuries is not wiped out in a generation or two. Which of them can boast a century and a half of democracy? We are young, yes, but in democracy it is the other nations who are the parvenus. Indeed, our government has existed in its present form longer than any other "civilized" government in the world.

NO, THE foreign-born may be fully as good *folk* as we are, but they have not in them the inheritance to make them as good *Americans.* Just as, if we immigrated to Italy, for example, we *could* not, because of our different inheritance, become in a generation or two as good Italians as the native-born Italians.

There are native-born Americans as low as the lowest, and foreign-born as good as the best. But that doesn't alter the case. There is no cause to praise us or to blame them. It is simply that we were born and bred to the job of being Americans. They were born and bred to the job of being something else.

The one point I'm driving at is that our inherited equipment for being Americans in the best sense of the word is not something to boast about, but an *obligation.* An obligation we haven't met creditably. The foreign-born as a human being is as good as we are, allowing for the fact that we don't always get a type up to the mother country's own average. The foreign-born is good material for American citizenship. Good *material.* He can't automatically become a good American citizen merely by remaining here a while and taking out some papers. It's *our* job to teach him how to change from a good Italian, English, Polish, etc., into a good American citizen, and how to make his children into still better American citizens. And we don't do it and never have done it. Some day I hope we shall.

AND one of the ways to do it is to let him see occasionally what a really good native-born American citizen is like inside. He doesn't often get the chance. Many of us are bad Americans and bad everything else, but there abide in some of us the things worth while—the hidden ideals that made America, that in their day led the world in the march toward freedom and that may yet triumph over the materialism that sweeps us now—us and the remainder of the "civilized" world.

So here is one glimpse at what goes on inside a really good native-born American. Mr. Spears did not write it with any such idea in mind. That is why it is valuable—it is unconscious, from the heart. Nothing is said about native-born *vs* foreign-born, nothing about the duties of citizenship. The writer does not even know I'm passing it on to you. I've not asked his permission; he'll have to let me use it because it ought to be used.

My feeling is, that New York is America's great Mecca. Those who have arrived there seem to lose touch with The Sticks. I see this in countless things. You see, I lived in New York eight years, four as a boy, four as a man. Letters, editorials, comments, even letters on rejected and accepted manuscripts disclose—what shall I call it?—lack of sympathy, lack of knowledge, lack of iunderstandng—I might say impatience toward certain aspects of the spirit of the small towns, the farms, the woodlands, the prairies, the mountains. It is as though the echoes of the oceanic surf that rolls up on the strands of Manhattan's shores are missed along Broadway and in the din of Third Avenue and Harlem. Why should the successful listen to those who never arrive?

I SPEND my life listening, watching, trying with all I have to catch the refrain of abiding faith that is our American courage and hope, longing beyond expression to get it down in words, between the lines. The spirit of America is fair play, and alcohol never played fair. Our people toil forward, not knowing they move; they look up, and are astonished to see the miles they have come—Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt; where is taxation without representation, tribute to foreign powers, slavery and, now, alcohol? And by and by, the emancipation, political, of women will be seen as a the marvelous American accomplishment, perhaps greatest of our people's.

I worship the cool hearts of brave men, because I have known much fear. I sit at the feet of the courageous because we all know that nothing—not wit, not science, not any known thing—will go forward without carelessness of intrepid heroism. The spirit of adventure is the banner-carrier of all humanity's accomplishments toward that dull day of peace and satisfaction when nothing more remains to be endured or done. To some are given great tasks, which they do, and to some are trivial and little putterings. Perhaps we do not really any of us know what is right, except helping the other fellow be a bit happier. or what is wrong, except cruelty to the weak and defenseless—and I doubt if any man or woman, looking back, can know his work's importance, nor does any contemporary. Who knows, for example, what Ask Adventure letter may not change the destinies of a boy, who in turn may change the history of peoples?
—SPEARS.

ANOTHER of our writers' brigade has taken the Long Trail whose end no man knows. Orville Leonard died suddenly at his home in New Canaan, Connecticut, December 6, 1924, at the age of fifty-seven. Camp-Fire follows its custom of rising to stand with bared heads and wish him Godspeed on his journey.

We knew him only through his stories and his letters, but it was enough to win our friendship and respect.

He lived much of his life in the West and his book, "The Land Where the Sunsets Go," is familiar to many of us. Another book, written for children, "Sawdust and Squeaks," was practically completed when he died.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin board

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Arizona—200—Clifton. C. Hooker.
209—Quartzite. Buck Conner, Box 4.
Arkansas—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 382 Morrison Ave.
California—28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
89—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
108—Helendale G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
114—Mill Valley. L. F. Guedet, Restawhyle Knoll.
115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
116—Sebastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham. Box 388.
141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
149—San Francisco. A. H. Hutchinson, Veteran Press, 1264 Valencia St.
186—Santa Ysabel. William Strover, Santa Ysabel Inn.
210—Berkeley. Dr. Louis C. Mullikin, 305 Acheson Bldg.
211—Pomona. Fred G. Sunley, 480 E. Alverado St.
212—Del Monte. Alex H. Sokoloff, 3rd Signal Co. R. O. T. C.
231—San Francisco. Earl V. Swift, 24-A Brady St.
251—Williams. Joe Lanouette, Opera Pool Hall.
252—Fresno. Mrs. Harriet Church, Echo Gardens, 712 Echo Ave.
257—San Francisco. K. F. Richards, 1807 Post St.
266—Santa Barbara. E. Chester Roberts, 714 State St.
273—Los Angeles. Henry M. Harrod, 6615 So. Main St.
Colorado—105—Grand Junction, Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.
267—Sugar Loaf. Frank Earnest.
279—Denver. DeForrest Hall, 2531 Bryant St. E.
Connecticut—142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.
Delaware—232—Delmar. J. A. Aniba, Stone House Hotel.
D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St, N. E.
Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 49 N. E. First St.
117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Call*.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.
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58. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

59. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

60. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

61. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Box 843, Inglewood, Calif. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
HOWARD A. SHANNON, care of *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

63. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
HOWARD A. SHANNON, care of *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

64. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

65. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 1419 S. W. Fifth St., Miami, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

66. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

67. Eastern U. S. Part 7 New Jersey
FRANCIS H. BENT, Farmingdale, N. J. Topography, hunting, fishing; automobile routes; history; general information.

A.—Radio

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the Forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

FRED. F. FLEISCHER care of *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, military policy National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, care of *Adventure*. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

K.—First Aid on the Trail

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazards of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

L.—Health-Building Outdoors

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

M.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

N.—Herpetology

Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

O.—Entomology

Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

N.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions**, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S.**, its **possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept., of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines**, **Porto Rico**, and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash, D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National Rifle Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men**, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

Mosquito Dope

HEAD nets beat drugs:

Request:—"Will appreciate very much your advice on the preparation of mosquito dope.

I am going on a prospecting and hunting trip very shortly on the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska, and I learn that the mosquitos are plain —— in most places there.

I am enclosing self-addressed and stamped envelop for reply, and thank you."—E. S. **Bateman**, Seattle, Wash.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—You've asked me a poser! I've hunted and camped in Maine and New Brunswick in June and July when the skeeters were so thick that they would work through a double mosquito bar—they worked in relays of three; two would push a third through the meshes. Also, lived near the Hackensack meadows where they have been known to sting a five-year-old child to death when lost in the tall grass. Have found them even in the arctic; but they get action more slowly up there—you can *git* 'em!

Well, with all this above I've tried innumerable varieties of "dope" and never found any of them entirely satisfactory. None ever really proved a success. A mixture of oil of pennyroyal and sweet oil is perhaps as good as any. Put a liberal amount of pennyroyal in, using the sweet oil as a carrier, and you'll have to renew often on face and hands. In the northeastern timber they use tar oil and oil of citronella, which I found fair.

A head net is an absolute preventive where it can be used, or a helmet of cotton cloth made to fit the entire head closely, leaving only the face exposed from the eyebrows to the lower lip; the skirt is long and tucks under the hunting-coat collar, and you put your dope only on the exposed portion of the face. My father used this with very good success fishing in New Brunswick in May.

Last summer up here I find the mosquitoes not so bad but the tiny black gnats will drive you to moonshine. You can always get rid of both with a smudge in your tent; if you have a camp stove, leave all the covers off and if there is not enough smoke put in some moss. I do this every evening when they are bad. Take along a few blocks of camphor gum—it floats on water with a tiny margin above surface—light this *dry* surface and it will burn a long time, forming a small dam as it sinks that keeps the water out. The fumes will banish them. Put the gum carefully in a tin cup of water so as not to wet the upper surface. They are sure bad where you're going; you have my sympathy.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Poland

MOSTLY down, but never out:

Request:—"Will you please send me any information possible on the languages and history of Poland."—**Irma Moorhead**, Eastland, Tex.

Reply, by Mr. Fleischer:—As far as the languages of Poland are concerned, about ninety percent. of the people speak Polish, seven percent. German, and the remainder Russian.

The Polish language is part of the great Slavic branch and is closely related to Russian. It is a very difficult language, having a great number of consonants to a small number of vowels. It is also possesses of a very, I'd say extremely, difficult grammar, although it is not devoid of a certain beauty of expression if spoken correctly.

It has greater power of expression than English;

and if you have ever read "Quo Vadis" (Wither Goest Thou?) by the foremost Polish writer, Henryk Sienkiewicz, you will understand what I mean. I would suggest you read this book and then "Fire and Sword" by the same author.

This latter book deals with Polish history. The history of Poland is one of continuous suffering, the ancient kingdom having been divided no less than twice by three great powers, Russia, Austria and Prussia. The Russians were the worst oppressors of the Poles. It is impossible to give even a brief outline in this letter, and you can easily look up the history of Poland at the public library.

Oxen

TIMES when they were used as riding animals:

Request:—I am much interested in oxen. Are they used in Oregon and Washington or California? I am also curious about some illustrations I saw showing pack oxen in the Dominican Republic and of men riding them, but could not get to know much about them.

Perhaps your territory does not extend to Puerta Plata, where I saw the pictures. Anyhow, send me all the information you can spare, which will be much appreciated. I take a great interest in your magazine especially in the foreign element.—J. H. M., BROCKET, Alberta, Canada.

Reply, by Mr. Harriman:—If oxen are used in Oregon and Washington now, it is only in the wilder and more inaccessible parts. The motor truck is doing the bulk of the hauling now, even hauling logs. Horses and mules do their share. I have seen many fine teams of horses and mules there, but no oxen. Of course, I have not been all over that country, and there may be ox teams in the backwoods; but they are not used at all universally.

I have seen oxen used to pack stuff and to ride, right in the State of Minnesota, between 1865 and 1875. Have used one as a riding animal myself, while a boy—a big black-and-white brute, who weighed a little more than 2,200 pounds. His mate outweighed him by 20 pounds and once saved my life by interfering when a big bull had me scared limp and in a corner where I could not escape. He whipped the bull.

Ox teams were formerly used altogether in hauling out logs in our redwood forests, but now they lay tracks and use a locomotive.

My territory stops at the north line of Mexico and the east line of Arizona. You will see in *Adventure* that I have just six of our States—Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah and Arizona.

Canadian stamps are not good from this end of the country, so I am returning yours. Only the stamps of the country where a letter originates can carry it to its destination. Get International Reply Coupons.

New Guinea

THE biggest island continent in the world—not counting Australia, which is too big to be called an island any more:

Request:—"Having been interested in your country for some time past, I concluded it would do no harm to write to you in regards to commerce, inhabitants and general life."—HOWARD LABERKERGER, Blauvelt, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Armit:—I will try to give the information you ask for on the commerce, inhabitants and general life of New Guinea in the space of a letter. It is a tall order—but I hate to be balked.

Commerce	*Imports*	*Exports*
Territory of New Guinea	$2,512,000	$4,245,500
Dutch New Guinea	$ 24,370	$ 16,950
Territory of Papua	$1,506,000	$1,042,000

Imports made up of groceries, spirits, beer, tobacco, textiles, agricultural products, meat, apparel, machinery, boats, vessels, glassware, timber, oils, paints, iron and steel, sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, drugs, and chemicals.

Exports consist mostly of copra, rubber, coffee, cocoa, gold, pearls, birdskins (from Dutch New Guinea only), shell, sandal wood, trepang, copper ore, gums, barks, hemp.

Inhabitants. The island of New Guinea is inhabited by Melanesian peoples. For detailed information I recommend your reading the books I list hereafter:

"The Melanesians of British New Guinea," by Dr. Seligman, published London, England, Cambridge University Press.

"The Island of Vanishing Men," by W. F. Alder, published, London, England, Leonard Parsons, Ltd.

These books are written about the people in the British and Dutch sections of the great island.

General Life. This is a poser. However, get the following books from your public library and you will not be disappointed:

"Patrolling in Papua," by Humphries. Fisher Unwin, London.

"Papua or British New Guinea," Murray, same publisher.

"Argonauts of the Western Pacific," Malinowski, London.

"Pygmies and Papuans," Wollaston, London.

Hints on Shooting Quail

GOSSIP for the man who's interested in shotguns:

Request:—"Am writing for information concerning a Remington 12-gage automatic shotgun, 28-inch, modified barrel.

Could you send me a graphic, showing the trajectory of the load up to its maximum effect. Also, could you tell me about the average lead for quail flying at an angle and if it is necessary to aim under the bird flying straight-away—the same as you aim with a 30-30 rifle at a bull's-eye?

Why is it that all automatic shotguns are listed with only 28-inch barrels? Is that just the best all-around length for all game?"— J. F. WARD, Wytheville, Va.

Reply, by Mr. Thompson:—Such a thing as trajectory in the shooting of a shotgun obviously has never to my knowledge been measured. It is a question of pattern and penetration, for the velocity is insignificant compared to high-power rifles. Furthermore, there are different loads and sizes of shot; and each would have something to do with those important things, pattern and penetration. A gun that patterns 70 per cent. at 40 yards is doing good work.

On straight-away quail never do I hold under them but slightly high on them for the reason that invariably they are rising all the time. The lead I give crossing or quartering quails varies considerably with the distance. Quail-shooting practically is very close, and even at forty yards seldom do I lead more than a foot. A modified choke in the Remington automatic will do good work on quail, but possibly smash up some close ones in cover as the distances seem greater than they are. Rifle-shooting and quail-shooting are vastly separate arts.

The automatics are 28-inch because they function in that length better than with longer barrels. The best all-around length of barrels is a matter of the individual's ability to line up with them. If bored in like manner, they will all shoot the same from 26-inch up. Though at long range a long barrel is easier to line up and *vice versa* at short distances, it is easier to get on quickly with a short barrel.

Textiles in Argentine

SOUTH AMERICA is learning to make its own clothes.

Request:—"I am interested in the textile industry; is this field fully developed in Argentine, and if so what part of the country is most adapted for its manufacture. This includes both cotton and wool. I am a graduate of a textile school, and what are the prospects of a position in this line? Could you refer me to some good books on this subject."—E. I. SALVAIL.

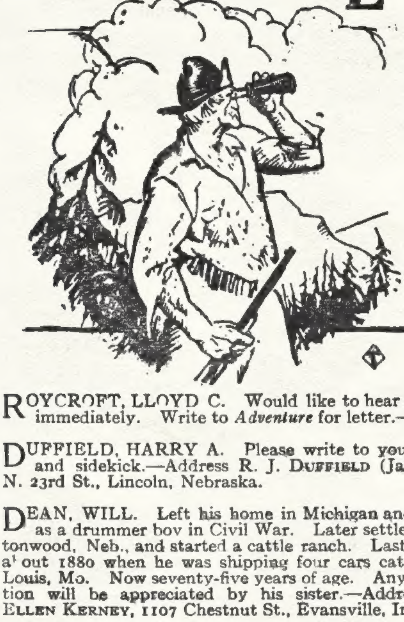
Reply, by Mr. Wm. R. Barbour:—The textile industry is becoming quite well established in Argentine, both cotton and wool cloth, hosiery, blankets, etc., being turned out. The mills are comparatively small as yet, and are established mostly in Buenos Aires.

However, Argentine still imports, from Europe and the United States, the finer grades of cotton cloth, fine suitings, etc. Argentine is a great wool producer, and is beginning to grow cotton, so I believe that within a few years she will be entirely self-supporting in the matter of textiles. I do not believe she manufactures any silk or linen cloth, though flax (raised for the linseed oil) is a staple crop of the country.

I cannot say as to prospects for work, never having had occasion to investigate. I do not know of any books which have to do with textiles in Argentine.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address J. D. NEWSOM, *Adventure*, New York.

LOST TRAILS



NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

◆

ROYCROFT, LLOYD C. Would like to hear from you immediately. Write to *Adventure* for letter.—L. C. R.

DUFFIELD, HARRY A. Please write to your old pal and sidekick.—Address R. J. DUFFIELD (Jack), 1603 N. 23rd St., Lincoln, Nebraska.

DEAN, WILL. Left his home in Michigan and enlisted as a drummer boy in Civil War. Later settled in Cottonwood, Neb., and started a cattle ranch. Last heard of about 1880 when he was shipping four cars cattle to St. Louis, Mo. Now seventy-five years of age. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. ELLEN KERNEY, 1107 Chestnut St., Evansville, Ind.

WOULD like to hear from those who knew me while serving in Camp Supply Detachment, Q. M. C., Camp Merritt, N. J.—Address WM. PETER CRETECOS, 361 Broad St., Waverly, N. Y.

BAKER, CAPT. JAMES J. Resident of Baltimore, Sailed with R. A. Grunnelle on steamer *Colati*. Any information will be appreciated.—Address R. A. GRUNNELLE, Riverview Hotel, Hoboken, N. J.

CLUTE, HENRY C. Who died about 1880, and who at one time was a resident of northern New York. He left a large business interest in Saskatchewan. He had relatives by marriage named Bloss, Brundige and Williams. Information is wanted of any relatives or of persons connected in any way, business or otherwise, and will be greatly appreciated.—Address E. L. Q., care of *Adventure*.

McKAY, JOHN. About forty-two years of age; formerly of San Luis Obispo, Calif., son of Louisia Castro McKay Keller. Please write your sister whom you have not seen or heard from in many years.—Address MRS. HILDA KELLER CANELLIS, 209 29th St., San Francisco, Calif.

HOPKINS, LOUIS. Formerly of Aurora, Mo. and Galena, Kansas. About fifty-five or sixty years of age. Last heard of he was mining in Idaho or Montana. Any information will be appreciated by his relatives.—Address R. C. E., 17 Schenck Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

O'SHEA, WM. Little son, mother loves you and wishes to communicate with you. Send address to RALPH.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

FRAKE, WILLIAM. Last heard of in the 8th Cavalry, Co. K., Candelaria, Texas in July 1, 1918. He is five feet five inches tall, weight about one hundred and forty-eight pounds, brown eyes, dark brown curly hair, twenty-four years of age. Any information will be appreciated by his brother who has news of his mother.—Address WALTER FRAKE, 5212 Woodland Ave., West Phila., Pa.

WALTERS, HARRY A. or Harold Knapp. Please send clothing and personal effects to sis. Address mail to me.—GEORGE W. LEA, Co. L, 4th Infantry, Ft. Lawton, Wash.

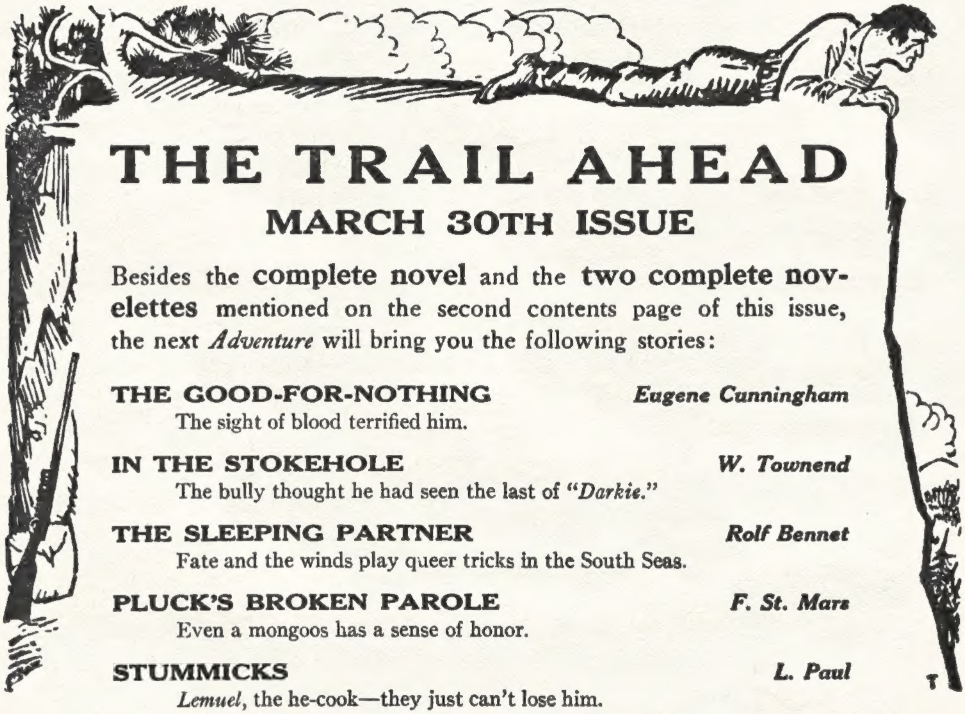
YOUNGLOVE, EMILY. Any one knowing of her whereabouts please communicate with her mother.—Address MRS. GEORGE YOUNGLOVE, 16 Mason St., Buffalo, N. Y.

THE following have been inquired for in the February 28, 1925, issue of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

BARBOUR, MR. AND MRS. CLARENCE; Bateman, Leonard; Connolly, Jack (John Joseph); Devine, Willard; Erdtmann, Gustav; Gilligan, Sidney Roger; Hart, James; King, Joseph Stanley; Kilgore, Millard F.; Pariera, G. W. Mrs. (née Jessie Isabel Kelly); Petterson, John; Roycroft, Lloyd C.; Ruff, Harold.

MISCELLANEOUS—Annie; any information as to P. J. Lynch, Robert Auburn and F. J. Temple who were in Mexico and Central America, 1910-11; and Noel Dunning who was in Tampico in 1915-16; F. 9 F. A. Captain R. W. McClure, B. C. F. 9 F. A. 1917-19, Arthur Houston, Pvt. 33 sec. F. 9 F. A.; Kyd Gyp and Shanghai; Ralph write to your old pard; would like to hear from anyone that was overseas with me in Co. I, 11th regiment, U. S. Marines.

UNCLAIMED MAIL:—Lloyd C. Roycroft.



THE TRAIL AHEAD

MARCH 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE GOOD-FOR-NOTHING — ***Eugene Cunningham***
The sight of blood terrified him.

IN THE STOKEHOLE — ***W. Townend***
The bully thought he had seen the last of "*Darkie.*"

THE SLEEPING PARTNER — ***Rolf Bennet***
Fate and the winds play queer tricks in the South Seas.

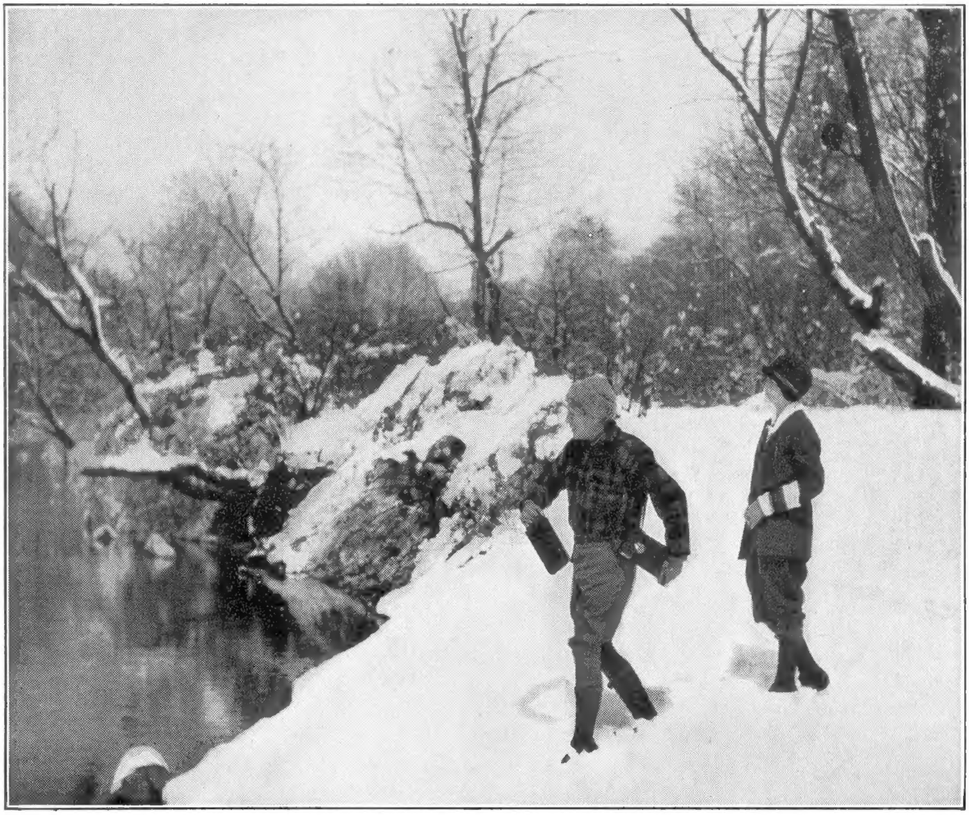
PLUCK'S BROKEN PAROLE — ***F. St. Mars***
Even a mongoos has a sense of honor.

STUMMICKS — ***L. Paul***
Lemuel, the he-cook—they just can't lose him.

THE BUSH LOPERS A Five-Part Story Part IV — ***Hugh Pendexter***
Carcajou defies the Senecas at their own camp-fire.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Arthur D. Howden Smith, Farnham Bishop, Robert Simpson, Leonard H. Nason, Thomson Burtis, Charles Beadle, Talbot Mundy, Percy Charles Chandler and Everett Saunders; and short stories by George E. Holt, John Webb, Wm. Byron Mowery, L. Paul, S. B. H. Hurst, Alanson Skinner, Royce Brier, Warren Elliot Carleton, Arthur M. Harris, F. St. Mars, Ernest Lyons and others; stories of French pirates in Madagascar, viking farers in Norwegian fjords, prospectors in the Rocky Mountains, fur traders in the Snow Country, doughboys on the Western Front, mounted police in South Africa, Army aviators in the oilfields, ancient Romans in the British Isles.



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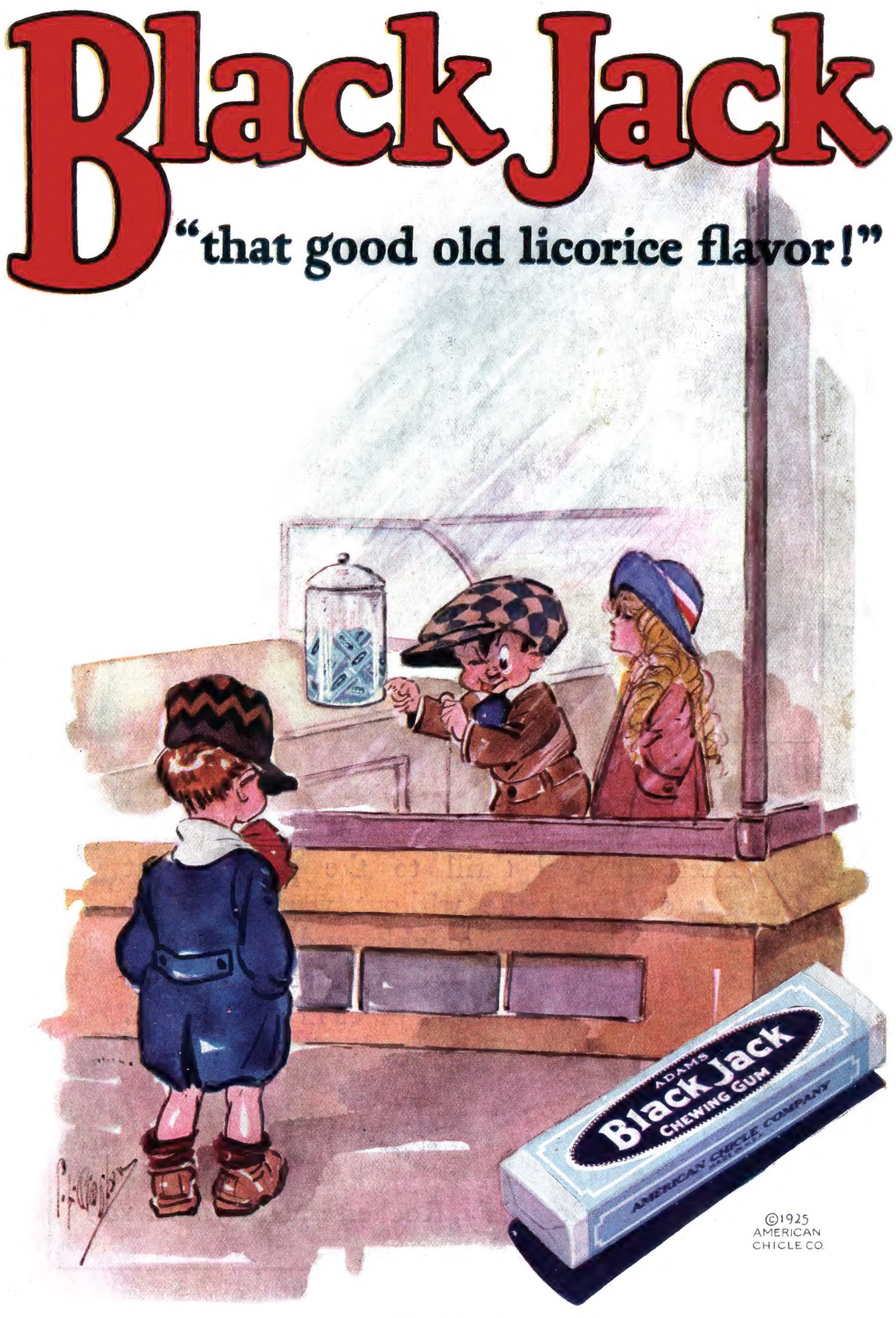
Black Jack
"that good old licorice flavor!"
ADAMS
Black Jack
CHEWING GUM
AMERICAN CHICLE COMPANY
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AMERICAN
CHICLE CO.

"HE WON!"